

HEROINES OF IND

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HEROINES OF IND



SAKUNTALA

THE STORY OF HER BIRTH

DO you know the pretty tale of Sakuntala, the pious orphan maid who won the heart of a mighty king? Her story is so skilfully told by a great Sanskrit poet that it has been translated from Sanskrit and may now be read in many languages. I daresay, when you are old enough you will read the poet's story or at least a translation of it; I shall now tell you the story as it is found in an ancient work, 'Padmapurana.'

Long, long ago, to the north-east of modern Delhi, there lay a famous city called Hastinapura. Here ruled a long line of kings, and one of the most powerful among them was King Dushyanta. He was young, but wise beyond his years, and as good-looking as any that ever lived on earth. In strength he had no equal, and he scattered all his foes like chaff before the wind. His heart lay chiefly in the sports of the field and in hunting. Bow in hand,

he often chased to death the fleet-footed deer and other animals of the jungle.

Early one morning he rode to a wood close by in search of game. There he saw a fine, spotted antelope, in pursuit of which he rode at the top of his horse's speed. But the animal was so fleet of foot that it took the king far, far into the wood. Tired with the chase, he was about to aim an unerring arrow at it, when a voice stopped him: "Pray do not shoot the deer; it belongs to our hermitage."

No sooner did the king hear the voice than he drew back the arrow. The words came from the disciples of the great sage Kanva, whose cottage lay near by. The sun had meanwhile risen high in the heavens and the king was thirsty after the long hunt. He, therefore, turned towards the hermit's hut for some refreshment and rest.

In a few minutes he came in sight of the cottage where all round reigned peace and perfect calm. With a neatly laid out garden in front and shaded by tall, graceful trees, the pretty little hut was a picture of loveliness. In the garden were many young maids busy watering the tender creepers. Among them was one who was by far the loveliest of her kind. She looked more an angel than a

woman. No one could look upon her and not love her.

This was Sakuntala, the heroine of our story. At the sight of Dushyanta, she spoke gently to him and bade him welcome to the hermitage, since the sage Kanva was away. She offered him a seat and gave him water to wash his feet and hands and then set before him a dish of fruits. Quite pleased with her kindness and having rested himself, he asked her who she was. "Tell Dushyanta, King of the Purus," he said, "whose daughter you are."

Feeling a little shy, Sakuntala bade her friend Priyamvada make answer to the king. "I shall tell you, my lord," said Priyamvada, "about her parentage. Your Highness knows that the royal sage Viswamitra did penance on the banks of the Gautami for many, many years. Like all our kings, he was a Kshatriya by birth and longed to become a Brahmin. A heavenly nymph, Menaka, came down on purpose to turn him away from his penance. Who that saw her could keep from loving her? Viswamitra fell a victim to her charms and graces, and the two lived happily together for a time. Only then did the sage think of what he had done and felt very, very sad. He went back to do penance and the pretty nymph who had now borne him a

daughter went to her heavenly home. But the child was left alone and helpless in the forest. The birds of the air, however, made friends with her and fed her day by day, till she was found by our sage Kanva. That accounts, O King, for her name Sakuntala, which means 'bird-protected.' She has ever since been in this hermitage and has grown up as Kanva's daughter."

"I see then," said the king, "that she is a Kshatriya maid." Turning towards Sakuntala he added in soft tones, "You will not mind, therefore, to wed a handsome youth of the same race."

At this Sakuntala blushed. For, in truth, the king had not been a little moved by her beauty and he longed for the day when he could make her his wife and queen.

HER MARRIAGE

Sakuntala ~~too~~ ~~was~~ was struck with Dushyanta's appearance and fine words. The king was very careful to observe this. He, therefore, made bold to ask her hand in marriage. But she, good lady, told him to wait awhile and speak to the sage Kanva about it. But he was so very eager about the marriage that he felt that any delay was out of the question. So he said, "I will give up my king-

dom for your sake, fair Sakuntala. Believe me, I love you better than words of mine can tell. Why do you then put off this matter till the sage comes back? I am certain he will not stand in our way. To wed of one's free will the person whom one loves best, even without the knowledge of others, is thought proper among us Kshatriyas. Pray, if you do love me, grant my request and let us marry at once."

"If you are to be my lord and husband, O King," answered Sakuntala, "it must be only on certain conditions. Give me your promise, I pray, to make the son I may bear you your heir to the throne, and give me also your ring which I shall keep as a token of our marriage."

"With all my heart," said Dushyanta and without any further delay the matter was settled to the great delight of both. With immense joy Sakuntala threw herself into ~~the arms~~ of the king and that very moment saw them married without any further ceremony.

Happily did Dushyanta spend some days in the hermitage in the company of his bride. Afterwards, it occurred to him that he had stayed too long away from his palace and he desired to return. As a token of his promise and as a proof of his union

with her, he gave the ring he wore to Sakuntala. As yet the sage Kanva had not returned from the forest.

“For the present, my dear, remain at the hermitage,” said the king to Sakuntala, “I shall soon take you to the city in all pomp. I shall send my ministers here with riches and royal vehicles for the purpose of fetching you. In the meantime, permit me to leave for my palace, as I have been long away from home. Receive the blessings of the great sage when he comes back.”

When Sakuntala expressed her willingness to all this, Dushyanta soon set out towards Hastinapura, asking himself, as he went, what the sage Kanva would think of the secret marriage.

The long-expected sage arrived at last at the hermitage. Sakuntala, however, did not greet him in her usual manner for she was very shy. Kanva thought of ~~this change~~ in her and came to know its reason by his divine vision, for, by his mighty penance, he had won the power of knowing things that might take place in his absence.

“What you have done in my absence, my child, is well and good,” said he at last, breaking the silence. “King Dushyanta comes of a mighty race. He is virtuous and strong beyond measure.

Further, to mate with a lover of one's choice without the pomp and ceremony of marriage quite becomes the Kshatriya race. You shall soon bear a son, great in valour and spirit, who shall extend his father's kingdom from sea to sea ; through him his house shall rise high in name and glory."

DURVASA'S CURSE

King Dushyanta set out and with him went Sakuntala's heart also. The sage Kanva left for the forest again, leaving his child and her maids in the cottage. But the lady had no peace of mind. She thought of the king and wept for very love. Dreamy were her eyes and pale was her face. She felt now as if life were empty of peace and joy.

Meanwhile there came a Brahmin sage to the place. In a loud voice he cried, " Who is there within the hermitage ? " No answer came forth and the sage was dreadfully angry. ~~Sakuntala~~ Sakuntala was too deep in thought and her maids were not alert.

The sage who had called there was the great Durvasa. Indeed, he was the spirit of anger come in human shape into the world. A mere trifle was enough to throw him into a passion. His will was law and he would stand no opposition. Though quick to anger, he was great in power. He was

very pious and well known for his severe penances. And his curses always came to pass. Once he laid a terrible curse on the mighty Indra when he negligently allowed his white elephant, Airavata, to tread on the garland which the sage had presented him with.

With terrible looks and his beard shaking with rage, this man of matted hair exclaimed, 'He of whom thou thinkest always, O Sakuntala, will forget thee.' The curse awoke the maids, who hurried out to him. In fury did the sage continue, "Deep in thought as thou wert, thou shouldst have minded the guest who had come to thy door."

Priyamvada went on her knees, begging forgiveness for her mistress. "Hear my prayer, O Sage, and listen to my cry," she entreated. "Lately wedded to King Dushyanta, my mistress has known neither rest nor sleep ever since he left her and went to the capital. Of him she broods day and night. She is heart-sore with the grief of separation. Humble is her soul, for in her is no pride. Her offence to you, mighty sire, is therefore one of absent-mindedness. O spare her and withdraw your curse."

At these words, Durvasa's anger softened and he grew calmer. "My words shall come to pass,"

he said, "but the curse shall break, if the king is shown a token of remembrance."

But the sage did not stay to receive offerings in the hermitage: he sped away like the wind. All this while Sakuntala was day-dreaming. Though present in flesh and blood in the hermit's hut, she seemed as if she were away from it, for she hardly knew what passed between Durvasa and her maid. Priyamvada, good woman that she was, did not choose to let her know of the sage's visit lest the news should upset her.

SAKUNTALA'S DEPARTURE

Days came and went, but no news came from King Dushyanta. Sakuntala's heart grew heavy and sad with care. Poor lady, she would stand in front of her little cottage day after day, listening for the rattle of the wheels of her husband's chariot. But our hopes are often unfulfilled and thus it was with Sakuntala. She at last grew tired of waiting. She thought of the sweet things the king had told her, and sighed loudly and long; she sobbed and wept in her misery. Alas! little did she know that her husband had forgotten her and that it was all due to the sage's curse. Oh! how many days of anxiety, how many weeks of bitter pain did she spend!

Soon after the departure of the king it became known that Sakuntala was to bear him a child. Kanva therefore thought it not proper to keep Sakuntala at home, even though no word had come from the king. Calling her one day, he said, "A wedded girl, my child, should not live apart from her husband. It is meet that she should go to her lord's home. To the king's palace at Hastinapura, therefore, do I propose to send you."

"Blessed am I, father," she replied, "I shall with your leave depart instantly. May I have your blessing?"

Then calling the hermits of the neighbourhood, Kanva informed them of his intention. With tears of joy they all blessed Sakuntala and wished her good luck in her new home. The ascetic women dressed her up in silken robes and adorned her with jewels, though indeed, Sakuntala's beauty stood in no need of them.

An old lady named Gautami, Priyamvada, and two of Kanva's disciples were bidden to take her to the king. At the time of departure, Kanva gave her valuable advice: "Hear me and be wise," he said. "Serve your elders. Love all the women in the king's household as you love yourself. If your lord wrongs you, bear with him and cherish him

in spite of it. Never give way to anger. Take no pride in your good fortune. Remember, anger stirs up strife and pride brings one low. Use none roughly who serves you, for in a good wife's tongue is the law of kindness. "

Thus advised, Sakuntala set out with a sad and affectionate farewell to her foster-father. All the hermits and their wives followed her up to the end of the grove and showered blessings on her as she parted from them.

"As Sarmishta was to Yayati, so be you the well beloved of your lord, my child," said Kanva.

"Long live you, and the king," prayed another hermit. "God bless you with a warrior son!" was the blessing of a third.

"May you gain the esteem of the king and be made the chief queen!" was the spoken wish of a lady hermit.

Finally, her maid, Anasuya, prayed with all her heart. "May you be happy for ever, O my dear Sakuntala!"

LOSS OF THE RING

Led by Gautami and her friends, Sakuntala travelled on, until she came to the banks of the Saraswathi. The sun was in mid-heaven and the disciples of Kanva who were in the party halted to

make their mid-day offerings in the river. Sakuntala went down to bathe placing in her friend Priyamvada's hands the ring that was given her by King Dushyanta. Priyamvada deposited it in a fold of her dress; but no sooner was this done than it slipped down, as ill-luck would have it, into the water below. Though she saw her mistake, she did not make bold to inform her mistress of it. The bath over, Sakuntala went through the mid-day rites and then they all set out towards Hastinapura. Poor Sakuntala entirely forgot to ask for her ring, for such was her hurry to reach her husband's palace.

Soon they gained Dushyanta's capital city and coming up to the gates of the palace desired to be let in. The porter informed the king that some hermits of both sexes had come with a message from Kanva. "What! a message from Kanva!" cried Dushyanta in surprise. "Bid my priest welcome them with all honour."

The priest Purodhas set before them water, milk, honey, and fruits and received them with proper ceremony. Seeing Sakuntala in the party, he asked, "Who is this fair lady? Whence comes she and on what errand?"

And they made answer: "She is Viswamitra's daughter born of Menaka. She was brought up in

message: 'To-day do I send you, O King, the woman whom you secretly married some months ago in the forest where you had been on a hunt. It is but proper for Kshatriyas to wed on this wise and I approve of it. Since she is to bear a child she must not stop away from her husband. Receive therefore, O king, this noble queen of yours.'

But Dushyanta's mind was clouded by Durvasa's curse. With regard to Sakuntala his memory was a perfect blank. Strive hard as he might, he could not call to mind the fact of his marriage with her. Harsh and unjust were therefore his words when he spoke to the sages:

"Who is it that desires to become my queen? Ah, this woman! Truly she is not virtuous. These men, my heart tells me, are no sages. In truth, their greed looks through their eyes. I am sure they intend to make a tool of the woman to gain riches. Surely, in vain is the net spread in sight of the bird."

The words cut the hermits to the quick. Angrily they foretold: "The day will come, O King, when you will regret your separation from her and pine for her love."

So saying, they strode hastily from the durbar hall; but the good priest spoke kindly to them and lodged them in his house.

In the meanwhile, old Gautami pleaded for Sakuntala saying: "It is not fit that you should treat thus this fair daughter of Viswamitra. She is a model of beauty and virtue. Look at her, O King, with an unclouded mind and know your own life." And she at once took off the veil that covered Sakuntala's head.

"Know, madam, that none in the line of the Purus ever goes astray," answered Dushyanta. "We are strangers indeed to the charms of this vile woman."

All this while Sakuntala stood as still and silent as a pillar. The king's denial was to her as unexpected as a thunder-bolt from heaven. At last she slowly gathered strength to address the king. In a shaky voice and with eyes dimmed with tears, she asked, "Know you not, O mighty King, that you won my hand in the hermit's abode, while you had been to the forest on a hunt?"

"Wretch that you are, I know you not. I do deny any connection whatever with you," he replied.

"How dare you say that, my King? Remember you not the vows you made me? Priyamvada, give me the ring the king parted with as a token of marriage."

But, alas! the ring was not forthcoming. How

could it be ? Did it not fall into the water when Priyamvada carelessly placed it in the fold of her dress ? No wonder, therefore, when her maid broke the news to her, Sakuntala fell down in a faint, crying, "Alas for me, what shall I do !"

Gautami took her up in her arms and comforted her, until she recovered.

Sakuntala again spoke to the king : "How can your marriage with me escape your memory ? Believe me, it is true that you came to Kanva's abode. It is wholly true that you loved me. It is nothing but the truth that you wedded me there. Before heaven do not forsake me."

But the king was unmoved. "Cease your prattle, silly woman, and get you gone. I can stand this no longer," he said quite sternly.

Once again the priest put in a word for poor Sakuntala, "Pray; let her stay in the palace, O King, till she is delivered of the child. From the babe's looks you may find, my lord, if she is yours or not."

But the king was unbending and the woman was compelled to leave his presence. Slowly she staggered away. Her head swam and her eyes grew dim and her feet faltered ; so much did her grief work upon her.

But, behold, there came down a sudden flash of lightning upon Sakuntala. A brilliant female form took her up and she was lost to sight. It was a wondrous sight to all.

When the news of it was brought to the king, there came a heaviness upon his heart.

THE LOST RING FOUND

One day King Dushyanta went round the city with his ministers. Indian kings of old did so very often to learn the views of the people about matters of public interest. At one corner of the city Dushyanta and his men saw a big crowd. Thither they bent their steps and perceived a poor fisherman being beaten with sticks.

"Come to the king's presence, foul thief," cried the policeman who beat him. "How came you by this ring which bears the royal name?"

"O spare me and hear my story," begged the poor man piteously. "The ring was not stolen."

By this time the king had joined the crowd. The unhappy fisherman told the story as to how the ring came into his hands.

"My lord, I am a poor fisherman living on the banks of the Saraswati," he said. "By fishing

in its waters do I make my living ; that is my sole trade. One day when I cast my net in the river, a huge fish was caught. I did not like to sell it but cut it up for my own use, when, to my great surprise, I found this precious ring inside. I knew not whose it was ; and, as none claimed it, I took it up to the city for sale. Believe me, O King, what I tell you is, indeed, plain, honest truth."

"Let me see the ring," said the king. And the moment his eyes fell on it, there rushed to his mind all the past incidents concerning Sakuntala. For, at the sight of the token, Durvasa's curse broke. He released the fisherman and returned to the palace.

Great was his regret for his disavowal of his handsome wife. He grieved and grieved and could find no rest. Long and deep did he sigh for her ; and all joy in life for him darkened like a winter cloud. To add to his misery, there happened another incident which affected him. News came that a wealthy merchant of his city, one Danamitra, had died sonless. There was no heir to his property and by the law of the land it went to the royal treasury. As he pitied Danamitra's fate, he thought of his own sonless state and felt sad beyond words. Time passed on heavily for three full

years and the hopes of recovering Sakuntala grew fainter and fainter. His grief told on his health and he looked paler and thinner than ever before.

RECONCILIATION

In our ancient works we have read that there were frequent conflicts between Devas (or gods) and Asuras (or demons). When Dushyanta was king, certain demons became so bold and strong as to give trouble to the mighty king, Indra. Dushyanta being the bravest warrior of his time, Indra sought his help in crushing the enemy. Defeating them in a fierce battle, the king taught them a good lesson.

On his way home he halted at a hermitage. Near at hand he saw a handsome lad playing with a lion-cub. Quite instinctively, he took a liking to him. Struck with the boy's boldness, Dushyanta enquired about him. An old woman that stood by answered: "He comes of the mighty Purus—a worthy descendant of a worthy race."

The king marvelled and could not understand how he was related to him. After a while, it came to his mind that he might be the son of Sakuntala who had been declared to be with child when she was last at his palace. Closely did the king look at

him and was soon lost in deep thought. The boy was barely six years ; yet there was a royal grace in his bearing. He looked every inch a prince of the noblest blood : in fact, he was the very image of the king. Such a close resemblance made him feel that he was his own child, the son of Sakuntala. " But was not Sakuntala lifted up skyward by a brilliant femal form ? " asked the king within himself. " How then could the lad be her son ? If it were so, where was the child born, and why should the lad be found near the hermitage ? " These thoughts ran through his mind, when there appeared on the scene the sage Kasyapa.

" Well met ! My blessings to you, O King ! " said he.

The king bowed, and said, " May I know, holy sire, to whom the boy yonder belongs ? "

" That is your own son, born of Sakuntala. You denied her altogether when she entreated to be received as your wedded wife. You are not to blame, for your memory was affected by Durvasa's curse. Forsaken by you, she was helpless, when her angelic mother, Menaka, came to her aid and took her up to my abode, where the child was born. He has now grown into an exceedingly brave boy and hugs wild lions by the neck. He

knows no fear ; he is very strong and sturdy for his age ; I am sure he is destined to prove a mighty king. Through him your house shall rise to the height of glory and his name shall resound from one end of the country to another. Take the boy and his mother ! they are yours," said the sage.

Then calling on Sakuntala, who was inside the hermitage, he continued, " Your husband was harsh to you because of Durvasa's curse. Now that the curse has broken, you will find him as loving a husband as he had been before. Follow him to his palace with your son."

What a tender sight it was to see the king and queen meet each other with love, after so many years of separation !

SAVITRI

THE BIRTH OF SAVITRI

IN the tale of Sakuntala you read of a patient woman who, unfairly used as she was by her husband, did not love him any the less. A perfect type of womanly goodness was she, beautiful, modest patient and humble. I shall now tell you the story of an ideal wife, a wife as she ought to be. "Who can find a virtuous woman?" says the Bible, "for her price is far above rubies." But is not an ideal wife far above all price?

In the land of the Madras in the far off north, there lived a king named Aswapathi. He was great and virtuous, his fame spread far and wide, and there were peace and plenty in his land. His subjects loved him as a father and prayed day and night that his days might be long in their land. Yet a dark cloud hung over his happiness. Blessed as he was with power and wealth, he had no children. The older he grew, the more unhappy he became, as he thought of his heirless state; more eagerly than ever did he now long for a child.

He made pious worship to the Goddess Savitri, the queen of Brahma the Creator. For eighteen years he offered prayers to her and made oblations in the sacrificial fire. Pleased at last with his devotion, she slowly rose from the fire in full glory. "Ask me, O King," said the Goddess, "the boon that lies nearest your heart, and it shall forthwith be granted."

With a face beaming with joy, Aswapathi fell prostrate before the deity, praying for children, "Grant me, O Goddess, this humble prayer of mine. May I have many sons that my house may live after me!"

"Knowing already the desire of your heart," said the Goddess, "I approached my Lord Brahma, and it is his pleasure that you will soon have a daughter, peerless in beauty and virtue. Accept, O King, what the Lord has been graciously pleased to bestow on you for the present."

"The Lord's will be done!" said the king with all respect, but hardly had the words passed his lips when the deity was lost to sight.

And it came to pass that shortly afterwards there was born to the queen a daughter of radiant beauty. The babe grew and was the light of the king's household and gladdened every heart with her childish prattle and happy laughter.

Years rolled by and the child grew into girlhood, and from girlhood into womanhood. As a woman she looked like a daughter of the gods, 'divinely tall and most divinely fair'; and oh, how good and gracious she was as well! To the poor and needy she reached out her hands. She was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. Honouring her father and mother with love and service, she was a comfort to them in their old age. Her friends she delighted with her kindness and wise advice and thus she endeared herself to every soul.

The young princes of the land dared not lift up their eyes to Savitri to ask for her hand, for so angelic did she look. They all felt she was beyond their reach. In fact, neither in good looks nor in qualities of head and heart could they come near to that gifted maid. So they knew their place and kept silent.

HER FATHER'S ANXIETY

Savitri was a maid of seventeen or eighteen summers and as yet no suitor came to seek her hand. Thinking of this, Aswapathi felt sad. One day as he looked upon her grown-up form while she stood near, his heart became, indeed, heavy with

great anxiety. Care sat on his faded cheek. "Oh, how miserable am I! My child is well-grown and yet no prince of rank has approached to win her love," he said. "Truly the stars are against me; else such a maid of exceeding beauty would have long ago been suitably married." Thus he cursed his own fate that Savitri was still unwooed and unwed. Well he might, for is not the father who does not give away his daughter in time held as blameworthy as the son that does not look after his widowed helpless mother?

But the king was as wise as he was great. He made up his mind that he should send forth his daughter to give her a chance of being seen and loved by princes who dwelt far and near. "My child," said the king, "it is time for you to marry and yet you have had no proposal. Go forth, therefore, and make your choice. Maybe, you will come upon handsome youths of the blood royal who will want to steal away your heart. But choose him who is learned and good, who is your equal in rank and wisdom."

Great was the joy of Savitri as she heard these words. For long she had been yearning to go abroad and to offer prayers at one holy shrine after another and sit at the feet of kingly

was once the powerful sovereign of the land of the Salwas but trouble had come suddenly upon him. He lost his eye-sight and, as misfortunes never come single, fierce foes attacked him and wasted his land and, defeating him, drove him out of the realm. With his wife and only child he came to the forest, where he had been living as a hermit since then.

From enquiries Savitri learnt about the kind-hearted and truthful disposition of the youth to whom she had given her heart. Born of parents who had never been known to tell an untruth or break their word, he was called Satyavan, the Truthful. Exceedingly dutiful to his parents, he was perfect and upright in his ways. On such a man did Savitri quite fitly set her heart and he too loved her as ardently as she loved him.

NARADA'S ADVICE

When Savitri hastened home and told her father the story of her choice, there was with him the great, pink-clad sage, Narada, who had come there on a visit. When she had finished, the sage who could look into the future exclaimed, "Alas! What an error!" The king was taken aback and he asked anxiously, "Is not the prince, my sire, wise and strong, brave and merciful?"

"Indeed," the sage made answer, "he is the pick of all the princes; he has the wisdom of Brihaspathi, the bravery of mighty Indra and the loving kindness of Mother Earth."

"Is he then lacking, mighty Narada, in generosity, in charity, in beauty?" asked the king, yet unaware what the good sage meant.

"No, not in the least: he is as charitable as King Rantideva who spent his riches in sacrifice, and as true and large-hearted as King Sibi who cut off the flesh of his body to spare a pigeon from a pursuing hawk. And, above all, he is as good looking as the bright moon in the east. But there is one thing which makes me said: his days are numbered; only one year more has he to live."

The words of Narada fell upon Savitri's ears, as a lightning-stroke upon a fine, growing tree, thick with foliage and flowers. They meant the ruin of all her hopes in life. Savitri was much shaken, but her purpose was not. Filled with grief, Aswapathi besought her to think no more of Satyavan. For, as things stood, if a year passed away, Savitri must perforce lead the sad, dreary, lonely life of an Indian widow; for truly hope that comes to all others, comes not to the hapless widow of this land of the Aryas. But Savitri was not of common

clay. To her sad father did she, therefore, say, "No, my father, I cannot cease to think of Satyavan. A maiden gives her heart but once. How can I turn to another? My fate is chosen, and I must endure whatever happens. Short-lived or long-lived, virtuous or vicious, Satyavan shall be my husband."

Pleased with her firm words, the sage said, "Steadfast is the heart of your daughter, O King. As sure as day, she cannot name another. Therefore do I approve of her choice; let Savitri have her wish."

"And so be it," rejoined the king to whom the sage's words were law. Blessing Savitri, Narada departed, and the king looked to the preparations for the marriage.

THE MARRIAGE

On a favourable day, accompanied by aged Brahmins and priests, King Aswapathi went forth with Savitri to the forest-abode of Dyumatsena. The grey old hermit was seated on a mat of *kusa* grass under the shady boughs of a teak tree. Doing him proper homage, Aswapathi disclosed to him the object of his visit. Quite naturally Dyumatsena said, "We are but poor hermits in the forest. How will

a princess of Savitri's position bear the rigours of forest-life? Right glad would I be to welcome your offer were I king of the Salwas, as I was once."

Aswapathi made answer, "Life is not all honey. Every one has his own share of joy and grief. Neither do I nor does my daughter care for the one or the other. I am resolved on the marriage; pray do not object."

The blind old hermit gave his consent and directed the wedding to be performed the same day. All the hermits in the neighbourhood gathered with their wives and children, to bless the bride and bridegroom. There in the midst of priests and hermits, before a blazing fire fed with ghee, Satyavan and Savitri became man and wife with the performance of the ancient rites. The wedding over, Aswapathi made for his city, leaving Savitri in her new home.

Though born a princess and bred up in luxury, Savitri cheerfully took to the severe life of the hermitage. Putting away all her robes and ornaments, she clothed herself like all hermits' wives in bark and fabrics dyed red. By love and service, by patience and self-denial, she won the hearts of all. Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low. She looked well to the ways of her household. A great

help she was to Dyumatsena in his devotions, and for her mother-in-law she worked willingly with her hands. And with sweet words and skilful work and personal devotion she pleased her husband beyond measure.

SAVITRI'S RESOLUTION

But day and night the words spoken by Narada weighed upon Savitri's heart ; therefore, as time went on, her anxiety for her husband increased. As day followed day, Savitri counted them and, when it was but four days for the appointed hour, she took the vow of '*tri-ratra*,' the vow of a three days' fast and vigil. For three days she neither ate nor drank nor slept, but fasted and prayed and waited on her husband. It was a severe vow and Savitri kept it rigorously. A woman's observance of it, our old books say, tends to lengthen her husband's life. It grieved the heart of aged Dyumatsena and his pious wife to see Savitri fast and starve and her slender frame wither and languish. But what could they do? How could they cross her will in the matter of a vow?

At last the dreadful day broke. Savitri made her offerings in the sacred fire. By sunrise all the morning rites were over. She bathed and dressed and then bowed to all the aged folk in and about

the neighbourhood and to Satyavan's poor old parents. With all their heart they blessed her, saying, "May you live long with your husband!" at which Savitri devoutly whispered, "May it be so." When noon came on, the aged hermit and his wife lovingly asked her to break her fast, as the vow had been dutifully kept. But Savitri made answer that she would willingly obey them at sundown.

Meanwhile, with his hatchet across his shoulder, Satyavan stood ready to start to the wood. Evidently Savitri did not like to leave him alone that day. "I shall bear you company, my lord," said she; "I should like to go with you."

"The wood is quite new to you, my dear. The path is hard and rugged and thorny; and further, how can you, faint with hunger and fatigue, bear to walk with me in this dark forest?" he said.

"Neither faint nor weak am I, my lord," replied Savitri. "I pray you, do not prevent my wish in this matter."

"Do as you please, then," said Satyavan, "but take permission from our father and mother lest they should blame me."

This she did accordingly, saying, "Permit me, I pray, to follow my husband to the forest, as he goes to gather fruits. It is a year since I came

here, but never have I stirred from the hermitage. And greatly do I long to see this charming wood with its trees in full bloom."

This wish was granted her and Savitri and Satyavan set out, the wife closely following the husband with a smiling face but with a heart torn with anxiety. Pretty woodland scenes met their eyes : the peacocks danced in flocks ; silver streams tumbled down in cataracts ; the trees were all one mass of flower. " Behold, my love, these glorious sights," said Satyavan, in soft, caressing tones. But, as Savitri looked at him, the sage's words came to her mind and she counted him as dead. They went on ; but the heart of the woman was torn with anxiety and she was looking for the sad inevitable moment of her husband's end.

YAMA AND SAVITRI

As Satyavan gathered fruits, she filled the basket with them. He turned next to the collection of faggots, but as he cut the wood he had a sudden pain ; his head was in a whirl and he felt very unwell. Drawing close to Savitri, he said, " I feel a shooting pain in my head. My limbs ache ; my heart is sorely pained, and my strength fails me. The world swims before my eyes. I must lie down and sleep, for I can scarcely keep erect." Savitri held him from falling down

and she sat on the ground with his head resting on her lap. Alas ! the dreaded moment had come, thought Savitri. Fear came over her and made her tremble exceedingly ; but this lasted only for an instant.

Lo ! there stood beside Satyavan a huge form with eyes steadfast on the dying prince. He was terrible to behold, for his figure was that of a giant and he had a dark appearance and was clad in red. From his grim face looked forth a pair of eyes flaring red. However, like the sun, his body shed a lustre around : on his head was a small crown and in his hand a noose.

Savitri saw him and, starting up, slowly and gently laid aside her husband's head. With folded hands she bowed before him.

"Surely you are one of the gods," said she, addressing the strange figure. "Your mighty form has more than mortal appearance. Tell me, please, what is your will."

As Savitri was a devoted wife and pious woman, the grim, dark form deigned to make answer : "Know me for Yama, the God of Death. I am come to take your husband whose days are now ended."

"This is a piece of work, they say, which lies with your men ; why then did you come in person, O Lord ? " she said.

"That," replied Yama. "is because of Satyavan's uprightness and virtue."

Then he pulled out of Satyavan's body his soul which was of the size of a thumb. It was held fast in the noose. Turning south, Yama began to move. Greatly afflicted, Savitri too went behind him. Regardless of the prince's body which lay cold and unsightly, she had resolved to follow his soul, wherever it might be carried.

"Go back, O Savitri, and perform your husband's last rites. You have come as far as a woman can," said Yama.

"No, O Yama, where my lord goes, there should I also go. A woman should follow her husband even beyond the ends of the world if it be needed. And that is a commandment which shall endure. None can cross my path, if I be really pious, loving and dutiful. The wise say that if one but treads seven steps with another they make friends with each other. I have come with you so far. You are, therefore, my friend; and may I, as a friend, request you to listen patiently to what I say? Every one ordinarily passes through four stages—a period of singleness, of wedded life, of penance and asceticism. But is not wedded life, marked by love and constancy even in death superior to all penance and asceticism?"

Yama saw that Savitri was right. "Sweetly do you reason, O fair lady," said he. "Ask for any boon but your husband's life, and I shall as readily grant it."

With loving kindness for her blind old father-in-law, Savitri prayed that his eyes might be opened. "According to your wish be it unto him," said Yama, "and now turn back, my child, for I see you are tired."

"What weariness can I have," asked Savitri in reply, "when I am by the side of my husband? Where my lord goes, there my path lies. For company with the virtuous is sure to bring its own reward."

Highly pleased, Yama said, "Ah, fair and pure! Your words are so full of wisdom that even the wise can find instruction in them. I shall be glad to grant you another boon, if it be not Satyavan's life."

"My lord's father, King Dyumatsena, was driven from the throne of the Salwas, as he fell on evil days. May he now recover his lost kingdom, O Yama!" requested Savitri.

"It is granted," said Yama, and he asked the woman to return as she had now come a long way.

But Savitri entreated for mercy, saying, "Mighty God of Death, you are just and impartial and when a man's time has come, wherever he be, you carry him to the regions of the dead. So do

you in Satyavan's case, but pray listen to me : my prayer to you is for mercy. Mortals too, if they be good, show mercy to their foes when they seek it. You are a god. Is it too much to pray to you for mercy ? ”

“ I shall be merciful to you,” said Yama, to whom her words were as welcome as cool water to a thirsty man, “and I willingly grant you another boon, except Satyavan's life.”

“ My father, King Aswapathi, has no sons. Grant that he may have a hundred sons that his race may endure long.”

“ It is done, O fair one, and you had now better return, for you have come too far.”

“ Since I am going with my husband, I do not feel the length of the journey. My heart inclines me to go still further. You are the lord, O Yama, of justice and righteousness, and I trust in you. A man does not rely so much on himself as he does on the righteous, for they are a never-failing refuge.”

“ I have never been spoken to so gently and I am greatly pleased. Ask yet another boon, excepting, of course, the life of Satyavan.”

“ If such is your pleasure, my request is that I may bear Satyavan a hundred sons so that our family may live after us.”

“Fair princess, you have your prayer and you shall bear him a hundred sons, valiant and powerful. Return now at least, O Savitri, and let me alone.”

But Savitri sang the praises of the righteous and glorified their goodness and mercy. At this Yama was so far moved as to promise her one more boon,

“How can the boon just granted come to pass, O King of the Dead,” asked Savitri, “if my husband is not revived? Restore him, therefore, that your words may come true. Neither wealth nor life, nor even heaven, do I desire without my husband.”

Yama could not but grant the request. “O pious Savitri, by your extraordinary devotion to Satyavan you have won him back. You shall bear him a hundred sons and, free from any pain or illness, you shall live with him four hundred happy years. Your children shall multiply and rise to fame and set up many kingdoms in the vast land of the Aryas. Your name shall ever be sacred and go down to posterity as a symbol of wifely tenderness.” And with these words Yama set out to the south where his kingdom is supposed to lie.

DYUMATSENA'S GRIEF

With a glad heart Savitri made for the spot where her husband lay. Once again she placed his

SAVITRI

head on her lap and he soon awoke. Looking round he seemed puzzled. "I have overslept myself, O Savitri," said he, "why did you not wake me? Where is the dark giant that was dragging me off?"

"He has gone, my beloved lord. It is high time for us to return home. Rise up, if you feel rested; the night has already come," said Savitri.

"Directly I lay down, it grew inky dark. A grim form took hold of me. Can you tell me what it was? Say if it was a dream," he replied.

"The sun has long set and the night is dark. I shall tell you all about it in the morning. Get up, my lord; pray, get up. Already the wild animals that roam at night are abroad; my blood runs cold when I hear their terrible roar."

Satyavan looked all round and saw that it was pitch dark. He was most desirous to stay there till day-break, as it would be hard to make their way at night in the pathless jungle.

"But I shall light up our way home with the fuel that has been collected," proposed Savitri; "if, however, you are weary, my lord, I shall make a fire and we shall spend the night where we are."

Presently Satyavan thought of his aged parents. It was now rather late in the night and yet he had not returned. Oh, what mortal anxiety was he

causing them by his long absence ; Satyavan was, therefore, seized with longing to return at any cost.

"We shall go home, Savitri," said he, "I am now all right and able to resume our journey. My poor parents! How could they have borne my absence so long? Oh! how their hearts would be racked with grief! I am their only comfort in life, their joy and their shelter: to think of the agony I cause them! And"—

Satyavan could not go on: he shed tears. Gently Savitri wiped her husband's eyes and comforted him with the hope that all was well with his parents. She helped him to rise and, lending him an arm for support, she started with him to their hermitage, holding in the other hand his hatchet.

But in the hermitage all was grief and despair. When the aged Dyumatsena and his wife saw that Satyavan had not returned home within the usual time, they grew anxious about him. Each moment that passed added to their anxiety. Each rustle of the leaves they heard raised a hope that Satyavan was coming, but the next moment that hope would vanish. The shades of evening fell and yet Satyavan was not to be seen. Anxiety turned to despair. By virtue of Yama's gift, Dyumatsena had been restored to sight, but the joy of it was lost

in the grief he now felt. The aged couple searched far and near for Satyavan; tired and footsore, they looked for him in hermitages and woods, and on river banks and lake-sides. At last each ran about crying, "O my son, O Savitri, where are you?"

With great difficulty the hermits of the neighbourhood brought the distressed parents back to the hermitage. They comforted them, saying that, as surely as Savitri was virtuous and self-denying, Satyavan would come back unhurt.

Just then entered the long-looked-for pair. Oh what a joyous sight it was! Embracing Satyavan wildly, the old father shed tears of joy. The Brahmins lit a fire round which they all sat and asked the prince what had kept him so long in the forest. "Holy sirs," answered the prince, "my head ached with a severe pain, and I fell into heavy sleep and slept longer than usual. Beyond this I know nothing."

Then turning to Savitri, the hermits desired to be informed of all that had happened, for they marvelled greatly at Satyavan's unusual delay and Dyumatsena's recovery of eye-sight.

"Sage Narada had foretold, O revered hermits," said Savitri, "that my lord would meet his doom to-day. From him I was, therefore, unwilling

to part, for I knew not when the blow might fall on him. In the forest as he was cutting wood, he stopped suddenly, and came reeling to my side. I took him on my lap when Yama came in person to carry him away. I pleaded for the prince's life so sweetly, as he said, that he was pleased to grant me five boons. My father-in-law was granted his eye-sight and kingdom, my father a hundred sons to prolong his race, and I myself the life of my lord and a hundred sons."

THE END OF THE STORY

Next morning there came a great many men from the land of the Salwas to see their King Dyumatsena. And they told him of the cruel foe who had usurped his throne and had been done to death by his own minister. At last they prayed that the aged king might take over his own land and reign once more ; and Dyumatsena agreed. So they all set out to their old kingdom, where soon after their arrival, Satyavan was crowned as *Yuvaraj*. Needless to tell, Yama's boons were all fulfilled and Savitri and Satyavan lived happily till they were four hundred years old.

Thousands of years have passed since then ; kingdoms have risen and fallen, and races have

come and gone ; and many a change has come over the land : yet the name of Savitri lives for ever, and her story, told in song and verse, sets forth the ancient ideal of wifehood. Now, to-day, in many parts of India, on the eve of the full moon in the month of Jaishta, worship is made by all Hindu women in honour of that pious and devoted wife who brought back her husband from the gates of Death itself.

A similar tale, though not so fine as this one, was current among the ancient Greeks. Alcestis was the wife of Admetus, King of Pherae, and her love for her husband was so great as Savitri's that when his end was come, she gave up her life to save his, for a god had promised that he would be spared if some one were to die for him. Admetus sorely mourned her death and raved and vowed to take no other wife. By chance, Hercules, the most famous hero in all Greece, stepped into Admetus's halls on the day of her death and, seeing the king's grief, hastened to the underworld and brought her back alive to Admetus. The story is here given very briefly, but I believe you will doubtless read it in detail some day in the legends of ancient Greece.

THE MESSAGE OF THE SWAN

HOW few in this world are really patient! Do not many men and women fly into a rage at the slightest trouble or disturbance? Truly, of all virtues, patience is the most godly. That is why a poet says: 'Patience makes man look like a god.' You would, therefore, like to hear the story of an extremely patient woman who lived in days of old. She was, as a poet might express it, the flower of wifely patience. Born of royal parents and wedded to the most mighty king of her time, she went through sorrows and sufferings from which the bravest of mortals might well shrink.

She was Damayanti, the lovely daughter of Bhima of the ancient land of the Vidarbhas, so called after the sage Dhamana who promised the king the birth of children. In beauty she stood quite above all other women. She was fairer, it is said, than even the heavenly nymphs. The fame of her singular beauty went abroad and there were few princes who did not hear the praises of her beauteous form and glorious eyes.

Now there was a powerful ruler of the Nishadas, King Nala, who was the greatest among men. He

was handsome and valiant. Though still a youth, he had risen to great fame. Truthful and upright, he had perfect control over himself. He was learned in the *Vedas* and had expert skill in horsemanship. However, like all great men he had one failing: he was fond of gambling, though he usually lost when he played. Many a pretty-faced princess sighed for his love and longed to win him for her husband and when Nala heard of the infinite charms of Damayanti, a wild longing for her came over him. He knew no rest nor any peace of mind.

One day, as he roamed about a wood close by in this state, he came upon a flock of wild swans and caught one of them. In a human voice it begged to be spared, promising to do the king a favour. "O King," said the swan, "I shall sing your praises to that good-souled Damayanti, so that her mind will never turn to any one but you, and she will be made your queen." The king let the bird go and catching up with its companions, it took them to the city of the Vidarbhas and they all flew down close to Damayanti's side as she stood in her pleasure-garden with her handmaids. The women ran after the birds which were indeed very beautiful. But the swan that was on the king's errand fell into the hands of Damayanti whom it addressed in a

human voice. "There reigns over Nishadas, O Damayanti," said the swan, "a great king named Nala. Beautiful like the celestial Aswins, he has no equal among men. It seems as if he is the very God of Love come into the world in flesh and blood. If you, the fairest among women, wed him, this life and beauty of yours shall not be in vain. Men and angels we have seen, but we have not seen, to be sure, the like of him. He is the flower of men, as you are the loveliest among women." With a heart beating with love, Damayanti bade the swan speak of her to King Nala. The bird agreed and winged its way to Nala's capital and told him the success of its mission.

During that time, the fair Damayanti had grown sick with love. She was now pale and lean and thin; her cheeks had lost colour, her eyes were dreamy, and she was ever in deep thought. No sleep had she; often she lay and sighed and wept for love. The king saw this and arranged for her *swayamvara* or the choice of the bridegroom by the bride herself, lest her love-sick state should tell upon her health.

Thus he fixed a day for the *swayamvara* and invited all the kings and princes of India to it. Long before the appointed day, the city was thronged with the royal suitors who came in from

every part of the country. For days there was to be heard the deafening noise of their horses, elephants and chariots. And they were all welcomed in due state by King Bhima and accommodated in royal tents.

NALA'S ERRAND FOR THE GODS

In the meantime, the divine sage Narada, who was ever on the move, paid a visit to Indra along with another sage, Parvata. There, as they conversed, the topic turned on the great kings of India who were busy with the *swayamvara* of Damayanti. When Narada was loud in his praises of that beautiful maiden, there came the gods Agni, Varuna and Yama. They were so charmed with the account that they set out with Indra for the land of the Vidarbhas to gain the love of Damayanti.

On the way they fell in with Nala who seemed the God of Love's own self and whose body shone like the sun. Leaving their chariots in the sky, the Immortals came down to earth where Nala stood and said, "O mighty king of the Nishadas, we know you to be true and good. Be pleased to render us a service. Will you go on an errand for us?"

The king agreed, and then asked, "Who are you, sires? And what is the message I should bear for you?" "We are gods," Indra made answer,

"come on purpose to gain Damayanti's hand. I am Indra and this is Agni, the God of Fire; that one is Varuna, the Lord of the Seas; and here stands Yama, the dreaded Lord of Death. Go now to Damayanti's side and tell her that the very gods have come to seek her hand, and bid the princess choose, O Nala, that one among us for her husband whom she likes most."

At these words the king's heart sank, for he was come on the very same mission. How could he then plead for others and press Damayanti to choose one other than himself? But his word was given and it must be honoured. All the same he said, "My purpose too, O Indra, is to win this princess. It ill becomes me to plead for another before a woman whom I myself love."

"Why then did you promise at first to do our bidding?" asked Indra sternly. "Would you now go back on your word? See! Great glory shall be yours, if you do the will of the gods."

And Nala again spoke, "Suppose I go, how can I enter the palace which is well guarded?"

But Indra said, "You shall enter, if you go." The king obeyed his will and immediately found himself in the apartments of Damayanti. There she sat encircled by her handmaidens, outshining the

very moon in the lustre of her body. Her limbs were dazzling fair, her waist was small and slender, her eyes were large and lovely. No wonder Nala's heart swelled with love, but he controlled his emotion, for he must be true to the gods on whose mission he had come. The instant the ladies knew of a stranger's presence, they all sprang to their feet, quite amazed. They were full of admiration for Nala, and yet none dared to speak to him save Damayanti, who at last broke the silence and said, "Who are you, fair youth? And how did you enter these private apartments unperceived? I believe the royal guards keep strict watch, for the king's commands are very strict."

"I am Nala," said the king, "come with a message from the gods. The Immortals themselves desire to win you for wife. Indra, Agni, Varuna and Yama, each sues for your hand. Make up your mind, therefore, O fair one, and choose one of them for your lord. Remember it was by virtue of their divine power that I came here unseen by any one."

After a humble obeisance to the gods, she made answer gently, smiling on Nala, "I have become yours, ever since I heard of you from the swan. So I will choose none but you. It is for

your sake that the *Swayamvara* has, in truth, been called. My heart yearns for your love and, if you refuse me, hard will be my lot."

"But how is it that you desire a mere mortal," said Nala, "when the gods themselves seek your love? Truly, I am not worthy to carry their shoes. Do not, therefore, spurn the offer of the gods. Who would not wish to wed those who are the masters of the Universe?"

Tears trickled down the fair cheeks of Damayanti, and her voice trembled as she said, "I bow to the gods and reverence them, O king, but I love and choose you alone."

"Having come as a messenger of the gods, I cannot but plead their cause," replied Nala. "And hence I have thrown a veil over my feelings. How can I take advantage of this occasion to put forward my suit?"

Damayanti took the hint and her tear-stained face now wore a sweet smile. She found a way out of the difficulty in which Nala was placed. "Pray, ask the gods to attend the *Swayamvara*," she said; "I shall, in their presence, choose you for my husband, and you will in no way be held blameworthy."

Nala went back to the gods and gave a

she did in all humility. "May the gods show me the king on whom I set my heart the instant I heard the swan's message, so that I may be true to my first affection. Neither in thought nor in word have I departed from that decision of mine; and that I may henceforth too be true to it, may the real king Nala, be revealed to me. It is the decree of the gods that I should choose the king of the Nishadas, and that they may be true to it let them show him to me. May my vow to wed him alone be realised. Hear my prayer, O Gods, and assume your own form."

Then the gods answered her prayer. Their feet scarcely touched the ground nor did their eyes even wink. It did not now take long for Damayanti to find out her heart's beloved, the real Nala, whose feet rested on the earth and whose eyelids did every now and then wink. Shyly catching the fringe of his garment, she straightaway threw round his neck a beautiful flower-garland, and made her choice of husband, when up rose from the assembled throng shouts of applause, in which the gods and sages too heartily joined. Nala addressed Damayanti in the hearing of all: "Since you have chosen me, O sweet-faced one, even in preference to the Immortals themselves, I shall be yours and yours

only as long as life lasts." With folded arms Damayanti sealed her affection, in turn, with vows ; and the happy pair sought the favour of the gods who severally gave boons to them and then departed. Presently, the royal guests returned to their homes, well-pleased with Damayanti's choice. Amidst the rejoicings of all in the city, did Bhima celebrate the marriage of his fair daughter with Nala in all pomp and ceremony. For a long time the couple remained there in happiness together and then left for the land of the Nishadas, where they lived as joyfully as Sachi with Indra ; and, if anything was wanting to complete their happiness, that too was soon realized. For, in course of time, Damayanti presented her husband with a son and a daughter.

KALI'S REVENGE

When, after the completion of the *Swayamvara*, the Immortals wended their way back to their celestial homes, they came upon Kali attended by Dwapara. They were bound for Bhima's kingdom to be present at the princess's choice of husband from amongst the princely suitors there assembled. On learning their errand, Indra broke the news with a smile : " But the *Swayamvara* is already over. It is upon Nala, in our very presence, that her

choice has fallen." At this, Kali was exceedingly wroth, for he had set his heart on winning her. "If she chose a mortal man in preference to a celestial," said he, "truly it is but just that she should suffer heavily for it." But the Immortals tried to comfort him and made answer: "Her choice has our full approval. What woman in the world would not select Nala, perfect as he is in every respect, for her husband? Well-versed in all the Vedas, beloved of the gods, treading the sacred path of duty, patient, truthful, strong-willed, and, above all, absolutely non-violent and calm in spirit, though in strength like a tiger, Nala is more like a god than man, and whosoever, O Kali, desires to curse him, as it seems you intend, will only curse himself and come to grief."

With these words they departed and made straight for heaven, when Kali turned to Dwapara and said, "I am not willing to turn my anger away from Nala. I shall possess him and cheat him of his wife and kingdom. I look to you for help which you shall render me by entering into the dice whilst the king is at his favourite game."

Twelve long years had to pass before Kali could find occasion to enter the person of the king for so spotless was Nala's life and conduct. One day, at last, when in haste the king made worship

without washing his feet, the long-looked-for opportunity came. Possessing him, Kali tempted his brother Pushkara, to invite Nala to a game of dice and promised at the same time to win it for him.

THE GAME OF DICE

The challenge was accepted and the game began in terrible earnest. Month after month passed by and stake after stake was lost by the king ; and it was all the work of Kali and his companion who directed the fall of the dice always in Pushkara's favour. In consequence Nala lost his silver and gold, his royal vehicles and his costly robes. Possessed by Kali and mad with the love for gaming, he paid no heed to the entreaties of his friends who begged him to desist. His subjects and ministers came to see him and begged their royal master to give up the foul game. Damayanti, wan with grief and with words choked by tears, told him again and again that his royal subjects were awaiting his pleasure at the palace door ; but the king would not speak a word to his sorrowing queen, and the loving citizens of his realm had to go back with a heavy heart. Thus went on for months this game of dice between Nala and Pushkara, in which the latter won every stake.

At last overcome with fear and grief, Queen Damayanti sent word to the ministers through her kind nurse Vrihatsena, and called them in. But, when on their arrival Damayanti made her way to Nala and begged him to see his ministers, the king turned a deaf ear to the request and answered her not a word. Grieving, she went back to her apartment and bade her nurse fetch the king's charioteer Varshneya. When he was brought, the queen said in soft tones, "O charioteer, I know how beloved of the king you have ever been, and it is your duty to do him a good turn. The more he loses in the game of dice, the greater grows his passion for it. Neither does he listen to his friends, nor even to me, his loving wife. Only a few of his vast possessions now remain with him and he is heading, I fear, towards ruin. I therefore depend on you to do my bidding. Harness horses, fleet of foot, to the king's chariot and take my son and daughter to my father's city of Kundina and leave them in the keeping of my kindred there." Varshneya took counsel with the chief ministers of the king and, with their permission, bore the prince Indrasen and the princess Indrasena to the kingdom of the Vidarbhas.

In the end, the whole kingdom of Nala was lost to Pushkara and whatever else was left was also

staked and lost. With a smile Pushkara said, "What stake have you now? Queen Damayanti alone is left. You may stake her and perchance make good what you have lost." At these words Nala's heart was rent in sorrow. But finding his tongue at length he said, "Of course there is another thing to dice with." And he cast the clothes and ornaments he took off from his body towards Pushkara as if they were dice. Clad but in a single loin-cloth, he prepared to leave the city, throwing away all his wealth. Damayanti too, with no other dress than a single scarf, went behind and followed him to the outskirts of the city. There they stayed three days and nights without a morsel of food, for Pushkara had proclaimed that none should offer help to the distressed Nala on pain of death. And so it came about that no subject of the ruined king dared to give him food.

FALL OF NALA

Driven by hunger, Nala went to seek roots and fruits, accompanied by Damayanti, when he came upon a flock of birds with wings of gold. The thought that he could make a meal of them entered his mind; but as he cast his garment upon them to hold them fast, up they all rose into the sky with

the cloth, leaving him naked. The flying birds saw the king on the ground, a naked and miserable figure with his head cast down and said, "We are none other than the dice, come in the guise of birds to dispossess you of the cloth you wear, for it did not please us that you should go away even with that meagre garment on"

The king saw the birds fly and then looked at his naked form. In this trouble he turned to Damayanti and said, "O innocent one, the dice which robbed me of my wealth and reduced me to these dire, hungry straits have turned into birds and taken away too the one garment I had. I have fallen on evil times. My wits too are lost and I am mad with grief. Here are several paths which lead to the land of Dakshinapada; they pass the city of Avanti and Mount Rikshavan; there lies the road to the kingdom of the Vidarbhas, and yonder is the route that takes one to the country of Kosala." Pointing to the several roads, the distracted Nala repeated these words again and again, intending that his queen should betake herself to her father's land and seek shelter there in her distress. But the faithful Damayanti remained with him and she said, amidst sobs, in soft moving accents, "O lord, as I realize your meaning, my heart trembles and my

limbs lose their strength. You have lost your kingdom and wealth; you are naked and bare; you are hungry and toil-worn. How could I leave you then in this desolate forest and part from you in the time of your trouble? O king, I shall remain with you and, if in your affliction, your mind goes back to the pleasant days you have seen, I shall ease you of your pain and help you to forget your troubles. Let me assure you, my love, to a man in distress there is no comfort as great as a good wife who deserts him not in all his woes."

"It is in fact, my fair Damayanti, as you say. To one in sorrow no friend or medicine can do good as much as his wife. I do not seek to forsake you.

shall even give up my life, but never will I desert you, my innocent wife. Why then do you give way to fear and mistrust?"

"If you are unwilling to part, wherefore do you show me over and again the path which leads to Vidarbha?" asked Damayanti. "I am afraid that in your distraction you may abandon me. If it so please you, O king, let us both wend our ways together to my father's city. There you shall live in comfort with me, respected by my father."

"To be sure, my love, your father's kingdom is to me what it is to you; nevertheless, I will

in certainty not go thither in this sorry condition. Last time I was there in the pomp of fortune and shed glory upon you. How could I now go there, the very picture of misery, and cause you shame ? ”

Sweetly speaking in this strain, Nala hid his nakedness with one end of his wife's long garment. With but one scarf between them, they roamed about in the wild forest. At last overcome with hunger and thirst, they sought the shelter of a summer-house, and there, as Nala sank down to rest on the bare ground, his limbs covered with dirt and dust, fair Damayanti spread one end of her scarf and lay down close by his side. Sorely tired and worn out with grief, she fell into a deep sleep ; but the king, crazy with distress, could not rest. His mind went back to his sad loss of kingdom and of friends. Then it turned to the troubles before him. He went over various courses of action, but he scarcely knew what course to follow. He thought now of suicide, now of deserting his wife. It grieved him much to think that the poor woman should suffer for his sake. Perhaps, if left alone, she might, he fondly thought, retire to her father's home. At last, prompted by Kali, he made up his mind to leave her in the forest. He thought she would

suffer no harm on her way, for her chastity was her best protection.

His next thought was to provide himself with a covering. Of course, he could divide Damayanti's garment into two halves and take one for himself, but how could he do so without waking her? Nala was at a loss. Soon, however, he found in a corner of the house a sword which came in handy for his purpose. The scarf was cut in half and with one piece of cloth on, Nala went away leaving the sleeping Damayanti to her fate.

Yet drawn by his love for Damayanti, the unhappy king came back. Again he looked at her who was asleep on the bare ground in the forest-house, a deserted wife who had never been exposed before to the sun or the wind. And the thought of his sweet-faced Damayanti's distraction on waking up and finding him gone drove him mad. "Alas!" he lamented, "how could my fair Damayanti face alone the perils of the forest, ridden as it is with ferocious beasts and snakes?" And then, praying to the good spirits to preserve her from harm, he departed. Again he came to have another look at Damayanti. Many a time did he thus go away and come back. His mind swung like a pendulum, now pulled away by Kali, now pulled back by love.

DAMAYANTI

Yet he was beside himself with the spirit of Kali. And though he sorely lamented it, he finally parted from her. So it came to pass that the good King Nala forsook his innocent queen in the lonely forest and served the evil-minded Kali.

DAMAYANTI'S MISFORTUNES

In a short while, the deserted queen woke up and looked all round, and mighty was the grief that came upon her when she realized that her dear lord had left her. "Alas!" she cried, "how did you, my just and beautiful lord, forsake me while fast asleep? Are you helpless to keep the vow you made in the presence of the Immortals? Mock me not so, O king of the Nishadas. Pray show yourself. Are you hiding there in yonder bush? Wherefore do you not answer me? I do not grieve so much for my sake as for yours. How can you be left alone in this desolate forest, without your beloved Damayanti to comfort you as you rest under a tree in the evening, thirsty, hungry and fatigued?" Poor woman, she wept and mourned and sighed, and ran about in bitter grief. Often did she then set forth to seek her husband, but, as often as she rose up, her strength failed and she sank down.

With one brave effort the wailing Damayanti at

last set out in search of the king in the wild forest. Like a woman out of her senses, she cried, as she went along, "O king, O king," and even blindly ran to and fro. Sad and pale, moaning pitifully and sore distressed, she came upon a hungry python that caught her fast. The monster was opening its jaws to devour its prey, when she, unmindful of herself, bitterly grieved for her lord: "How could you bear your life when I am gone, O innocent king? How longingly would you grieve for me when your adversity passes and you are restored to fortune? How sad, how terribly sad, it is to think there is none to stand by you and smoothen your troubles in the forest where you now are."

These words of lamentation reached the ears of a hunter close by, who hastened to the spot with all speed. Finding her plight, he cleft the mouth of the snake with a sharp blade. Damayanti had in the meantime fainted. Sprinkling water over her, he brought her round and gave her food. But evil was in the heart of the wild hunter and his ways were the ways of the wicked. Drawn by her good looks, her sweet moon-like face and her radiant form, he asked Damayanti who she was and how

she found herself in the midst of the forest. And as she told her tale, he desired her and spoke words of love to her. But Damayanti's eyes flashed red with anger. Still the hunter did not draw back. Distressed as she was with the loss of husband and kingdom, she cursed the base hunter to death. And hardly had the curse escaped the lips of the chaste Damayanti, who had never failed to be loyal even in thought to king Nala, when the hunter fell down dead, like a tree struck by lightning.

Damayanti pressed on into the heart of the jungle, calling aloud to her lord as she went. The forest was dark and dense with trees and was the haunt of many a wild beast. But it had no dread for the afflicted queen, who went on till she reached a ledge of rock where she sat and spoke, addressing her absent lord. Ere long she met a tiger there and said in her grief, "O lord of the forest, I am the daughter of the king of Vidharba and the wife of King Nala of the Nishadas. I am in distress and seek my lord who has left me alone in the forest. Pray tell me if you have seen him, or devour me

and free me from all this trouble" But the tiger turned away and went on his way to the clear stream that ran afar off.

Then it struck her that the huge mountain ahead of her might help her with information. And so she approached it and said, "O lord of the mountains, I greet you. I am the daughter of a king and the wife of a king, the famous Damayanti. I am now in sore trouble having lost my husband and fortune. Did you see my lord come this way, the great, wise and lordly king, Nala? But no answer came, and the grief-stricken woman again turned her steps to the north.

HER FURTHER QUEST

Three days and nights did the noble Damayanti travel on, before she reached a penance grove. It was the home of sages, saintly men like Vasishta Brigu and Atri, who had forsaken the world, and clad in bark and living on water and herbs, spent their time thinking of God. A feeling of relief came over Damayanti, as she neared the hermitages. Respectfully bowing to the sages, she told her tale in brief and enquired if Nala had ever

strayed into their grove. "I will take my life," she added, "if I fail to meet him before long." The sages comforted Damayanti, and said, "Be comforted and strong, fair one. You will shortly meet your husband, the king. Looking into the future, we see nothing but fortune and glory for you". And behold, the penance grove with the sages, was in a minute lost to sight. Mute with wonder at this strange event, Damayanti was inclined to look upon it as a dream.

Leaving the spot, the astonished woman again resumed her weary travel in the forest and reached, with a wan and woeful look, a graceful *Asoka* tree in full leaf and bloom. "O pretty *Asoka* tree," she said, "did you ever see King Nala, my fair lord, come here clad in a single garment? The *Asoka*, they say, is one that banishes grief. Ease me of my grief and prove your name true."

Wailing thus in her distress she went round the tree thrice and made her way through a dreadful portion of the forest, where the trees grew thick and the mountains reared their mighty crests, while at their foot were deep caverns, and the wild stream rolled down from cataract

to cataract. The fair daughter of King Bhima journeyed long and far in her sad search. At last she came to the banks of a large river where she saw a company of men crossing it. In haste she joined them, but, as she was sad and pale, wild and dishevelled, care-worn and crazy with distress, she was taken for a woodland spirit. Some of them fled away from her in fear, while a few mocked at her. "Who are you?" they queried. "Wherefore are you come here? Are you a mortal woman or a spirit of the woods? Or are you an ogress or a goddess in human form?" And they prayed, "Whoever you be, pray do us no harm and guide us safe in our journey."

"I am but a mortal woman, the daughter of the king of Vidharbha," answered Damayanti in her soft manner. "In quest of my husband, King Nala, am I come here. Tell me if you have seen him." "Fair lady," said the leader of the company, "in our travels in this forest we came upon no man; only wild beasts we found in herds everywhere." Damayanti then learnt from him that he and his men were a band of merchants on their way to the land of the Chedis where ruled the good King

Subahu; and in her desire to find her husband, she followed them.

Many days did they travel together and, weary with long journey, they camped beside a beautiful lake. Its waters were cool and refreshing, its banks gay with flower and fruit and, to add to its charm, many a red lotus bloomed and blossomed on the water. The same midnight as the merchants lay fast asleep in their camp beside the lake, a herd of wild elephants came to drink water there. The merchants had brought with them elephants to bear their merchandise. The sight of these tame elephants infuriated the wild ones who rushed madly towards them. As they did so, they trampled upon the sleeping men and, all who lay in their way were done to death. But as Damayanti slept a little away from the merchants in the midst of certain Brahmins who had camped there by chance, she escaped this sad doom. The few that survived turned furiously on her and laid the disaster at her door. She was called an evil spirit who, the merchants thought, deserved to be stoned to death. Bewailing her hard lot, she attributed, like a good woman, the distress that happened to the merchants to her own ill fortune. With

a heart heavy with the misfortunes that had crowded on her, she followed the Brahmins to the city of Subahu, King of the Chedis, which she reached at dusk the next day.

IN THE LAND OF THE CHEDIS

As she entered the city, her miserable figure drew large crowds. Children followed her until she came to the royal palace, when the dowager queen, seeing her from afar, bade her nurse fetch the sorrowful woman to her presence. Damayanti, with tears in her eyes, told the old queen, the sad story of her life. "I am Sairandri, a servant-maid, @ queen, but I come of noble blood. I have been wedded to a husband whose devotion to me is as great as mine to him. But, as ill luck would have it, owing to intense passion for gambling, he lost everything he had, and then he left for the forest where I followed him like a dutiful wife to comfort and solace him in his troubles. Once in his hunger he went after certain birds, but they carried of the single garment he had on. Frantic and maddened with grief and hunger, he lay beside me in a forest-hut, but as I was fast asleep

he left me, tearing away half of my scarf I have been wandering about since then in search of my husband."

The kind woman was moved to pity and urged her to stay in the royal palace as a companion to her daughter, the princess Sunanda, until such time as Nala should return. Tired and footsore, she complied, but only on condition that the dowager should punish any one who dared to make love to her; and so, thinking day and night of her beloved husband, King Nala, Damayanti dwelt there in company with the princess Sunanda.

THE ADVENTURES OF NALA

One day, in the course of his wanderings in the forest after his separation from Damayanti, Nala heard a piteous cry from where he beheld a mighty fire. "Help me, O Nala, turn your steps hither." "Fear not," replied the noble king, and he made his way straight to the circle of fire. There he saw a huge serpent lying coiled up but unable to move. "I am Karkotaka, the king of serpents, O king," said the creature "Once did I play a trick on a great Brahmin sage who, in his

wrath, laid a curse on me, saying, 'You shall lie here motionless until King Nala comes and takes you away.' Only when you remove me from here, shall I be freed from the curse. Pray lift me up and carry me away and I shall do you immense good. You will find me light as you take me up." At once the snake shrank to the size of a human thumb. King Nala bore him away from the fire, and walked ten steps. But behold, at the tenth step, when he placed it on the ground, the snake bit him and Nala's figure changed. He turned dark and ugly while 'the snake assumed its original form. Karkotaka then comforted him and said, "My lord king, your figure has been changed so that people may not know you. That wretched Kali who has been the cause of all your misfortunes will henceforth find it a torment to live in your body because of the poison I have injected into it, and it will some day force him to leave you. Go now to Ayodhya and tell the king of that beautiful city that you are Vahuka, a chariot driver. King Rituparna of Ayodhya is an adept at the game of dice; and if you teach him horsemanship, he will, in return, teach you the secret of dicing. He will befriend you

and help you to regain your kingdom, and your wife and children. Do not therefore give way to grief. If ever you wish to look your old beautiful self, think of me and put on these garments." With these words, the Naga king gave him two pieces of celestial clothing and at once vanished.

Then Nala forthwith took himself off to Ayodhya which he reached on the tenth day. Presenting himself before King Rituparna, he besought him to take him into the royal service, and said, "I am Vahuka, a charioteer, and in horsemanship I have no equal. I shall help you with good counsel in all matters that need careful handling; and as a cook in the royal household, my service shall be famous. Further I shall be of help to you in other directions also." The king of Ayodhya gladly complied, and appointed Nala as the master of the horses on a salary of ten thousand pieces of gold; for Rituparna's greatest desire was that his horses should be made fleet of foot.

But King Nala's mind ever went to his beloved queen whom he had left to her fate in the forest-hut. So each night as he retired to bed, the officers under him could distinctly

hear him groan out: "Alas! where does the poor woman, distressed with hunger and thirst and worn with toil, rest her weary head, with her mind dwelling for ever upon her foolish husband? And whom does she serve?" Once impelled by curiosity, a fellow officer called Jivala, asked whom he thus lamented, but Vahuka told him his tale, as if it was concerning a third person, without revealing either his real name or his position. Thus, ever thinking of his forsaken wife, King Nala lived in the guise of a chariot-driver, in the palace of King Rituparna.

Meanwhile, the news of Nala's misfortune had reached the ears of King Bhima, who took counsel with his advisers as to what he should do to regain Nala and his wife. Summoning the Brahmins of his realm, he said, "Whoso among you goes forth and finds out my daughter and her husband Nala shall be rewarded with a village as big as a city, extensive lands and a hundred thousand cows." He supplied them with ample funds for the journey and bade them seek the fallen king and his queen in all directions. Accordingly they set forth to various places, but none met with any degree of success in their mission, save one

Sudeva. Fortune led him to the city of the Chedis, where he beheld Damayanti in the royal palace, as she was serving the Brahmins seated at a meal with food. No doubt Damayanti had grown pale and worn to a shadow with care and trouble, but Sudeva's keen eye told him that she was the daughter of King Bhima.

Drawing near to Damayanti, he said, "O Damayanti, I am Sudeva, a dear friend of your father, and am come here seeking you at his bidding. Your fond parents and loving brothers are all well, and so are your children. But all your kith and kin are deep in grief for your sake. Hundreds of Brahmins have gone forth to seek you and bring tidings of you." Damayanti made fond inquiries of her dear mother and father and other kinsfolk and friends and wept sore in her grief, as she thought of them.

Princess Sunanda saw her weep and sent word to her mother. The queen mother came and asked Sudeva, "Who is this lady, O Brahmin? How did she chance to be separated from her husband and kinsmen? Tell me, I pray you, how you happen to know her." "She is Damayanti, O queen," the Brahmin made answer, "the daughter of King Bhima, the

ruler of the Vidharbas, and wife of the wise and virtuous King Nala of the Nishadas. At dice her husband was won by his brother who took possession of the kingdom and sent him forth into the wilds with his queen Damayanti. They have not been seen since. King Bhima has sent hundreds of Brahmins to search for Damayanti and her lord; and as one among them, I travelled from place to place and came to this city where, by good fortune, I have found her. This lady of peerless beauty has a mole betwixt her eyebrows by which I knew her, though in her present dust-stained state it is not quite clear to view." Princess Sunanda looked closely and found the mole on Damayanti's face when, to the surprise of Sudeva, both the queen mother and Sunanda embraced her fondly, with tears streaming down their cheeks. "O fair lady," said the elder queen amidst sobs, "You are my sister's daughter and this bears it out. I was present when your mother, the queen of the Vidharbas, bore you in the palace of my high-souled father, King Sudarma of the Dasharnas. I distinctly remember the mark I saw then, and this palace of mine shall therefore be to you

as your own home, O my fair child." Bowing with a glad heart to her aunt, Damayanti said, "Long and happily have I lived here; but my heart strongly yearns towards my son and daughter. Therefore permit me to see them and order a palanquin to bear me fast to my father's home." The queen mother readily agreed. And escorted by a strong force and with her comforts well attended to on the journey, the sweet-faced Queen Damayanti was borne in a royal litter to King Bhima's city. Joyfully was she welcomed there by her kinsfolk; and the king, her father, rewarded Sudeva with a hundred thousand kine, a big village and a huge sum of money.

IN HER FATHER'S PALACE

When Damayanti had rested in her father's palace that night, she said to her mother, "My mother, if you desire me to live, bring King Nala to me." For, though she had joined her children and parents, she still had no peace of mind. Fierce was her longing for her husband, and truly without him, she could not bear life any longer. The mother of the distressed queen could make no answer, but tears blinded her eyes, for she

had been so overcome by grief. Her whole chamber rang with cries, as her attendants too joined in the outburst. At last, urged by her, King Bhima again sent forth Brahmins in all directions to exert themselves to find King Nala.

And as they set out, Damayanti instructed them to cry out, wherever they went, "O gambler, O my love, whither did you go, forsaking me, your fond and loving wife, as I lay asleep in the forest? That young forsaken woman remains clad but in a single scarf as she then was, and ever awaits you. O king, be pleased to have pity on her, whose eyes are ever wet with tears of grief." Then she begged the holy men to add to those words their own comments so as to rouse his pity. For does not the fire, when fanned by the wind, burn up the forest? And again she asked them to say, "Is not a husband bound to maintain and protect his wife? Virtuous as you are, how is it you have neglected both these prime duties? You are famous and wise and high-born and possess withal a kindly heart. You were hard upon me and probably it was due to my ill fortune. O, the best among men, have mercy upon me." Then Damayanti begged the Brahmins to bring her word of any one who chanced to make answer on hearing their words.

Again she told them : “ Learn who he is and where he lives. But hide from him the nature and purpose of your errand.”

And thus instructed, the Brahmins set out in all directions in quest of King Nala. Through cities and villages, hermitages and hamlets, strange land and realms, did they go searching for the king, crying the same words and making the same remarks, but nowhere was he to be found. And after a long, long while the Brahmin, Parnada, returned to the city of the Vidharbas and said to Damayanti, “ O fair lady, seeking King Nala day and night, I reached the city of Ayodhya where I sought audience of King Rituparna. Though I repeated at his court the words you bade the Brahmins cry out wheresoever they went, neither the king nor any one in his great court answered me. But when I took leave of him, the king’s servant and charioteer, called Vahuka, met me alone and spoke to me. He was ugly and deformed and had short arms, but great skill had he in the driving of chariots and the cooking of tasty dishes. Between sighs and tears he said, ‘ It is not meet and proper for a noble wife to be angry at her husband’s desertion especially if his mind has given way under distress. It does not become her to be displeased with one who

had his garment carried off by birds when he sought to capture them for food—with one whose mind is never at ease. A virtuous woman needs not the protection of others : her uprightness shields her from harm. It is hard to be angry with a poor husband, who has lost his kingdom and all his fortune and has fallen on evil days.’ Now I have come back in all haste to tell you what I heard, and you may inform the king, your father and do as you think best ”

And at that Damayanti’s heart was made glad and she wept for joy, and then secretly met her mother and said, “ O my mother, I beg you to summon Sudeva to your presence and send him forth at once to Ayodhya where King Nala resides at present in disguise, to fetch him here, just in the same manner as he brought me back from the city of the Chedis. But let the errand be kept secret from King Bhima. The queen agreed ; and Damayanti sent for Sudeva, and told him in her mother’s presence, “ Go forth, O Sudeva, to the city of Ayodhya and tell King Rituparna, ‘ O king, tomorrow, in her father’s palace, Damayanti, the daughter of Bhima, holds another *Swayamvara*. For, despite all efforts, she has no news whether King Nala, her husband, is alive or dead. And

the hour of choice is set at sunrise ; and all the princes and kings of the land are flocking there."

Duly Sudeva, the trusted Brahmin, fulfilled his mission. King Rituparna sent for the charioteer Vahuka at once and, making known Damayanti's decision to hold a second *swayamvara* on the morrow, said, "O Vahuka, it is my desire to reach Vidarbha this very day, so that I may be present at the *swayamvara* of Damayanti." At these words, Nala's heart almost burst with grief. "What ! Has sorrow turned her brain?" said he to himself. "Ah ! Poor and deceived Damayanti. The deed she intends to do is, indeed, cruel. Alas ! great has been my fault. Maybe, with her mind clouded by grief and with little hope of ever meeting me again, she has resolved upon this course. But how could she, the mother of two children, think of marrying a second husband ? Anyhow I will try to find out the truth of the matter by going there." And so, aloud he said, "I will do as you bid, O King, and take you to the city of the Vidarbhas in a single day. And you shall be there before sunrise to-morrow."

RITUPARNA'S JOURNEY TO VIDARBHA

Then Vahuka entered the royal stables and tried and tested the horses, and picked and chose. And soon he selected the best animals from Sind, slender and strong, well-bred, and matchless in speed and endurance. But as King Rituparna hurriedly got into the chariot, the horses fell, and King Nala, the charioteer, stroked and cheered them and in a minute they pranced and galloped off at top speed. So fast was their speed that, when once King Rituparna who had let fall a garment desired to pick it up the same moment, Nala, the chariot-driver, said "No," as they must go back a *yojana* to recover it. At times the chariot seemed to rise into the air, and like a bird it swept over rivers and woods, mountains and marshes.

Great was the delight of the King of Ayodhya when he saw the matchless skill of Nala, as chariot-driver, and he was eager to acquire it himself. So he proposed to Nala to teach him the art of dicing, of which he was a master, if he would in return instruct him in the secrets of horsemanship. Nala agreed, and as King Rituparna was taken fast to the

city of the Vidharbas he taught Nala his knowledge of the dice. And behold, there came forth out of Nala's body the spirits of Kali, who had so long deprived the poor king of his strength and energy and spirits. What a change came over King Nala! He was his old self again. He regained the beauty and lustre of his form, and his old vigour and strength, and King Nala wished now to call a curse on Kali who had been the cause of his fall and ruin. But Kali threw himself on the king's mercy and begged him to desist and fled in fear into a tree close by. When thus he was lost to sight, Nala drove on towards Vidarbha with all speed. Soon, seeing him gone, Kali slid gently out of the tree and went his way homeward.

The same evening King Rituparna entered the city of the Vidarbhas, with the chariot thundering through the gates; and the sound of the chariot fell on the ears of Nala's horses in the city and it rejoiced their hearts and they leapt for joy, as they had done many a time in his presence. From the palace Damayanti heard the wheels of the car crash like thunder in rainy weather and

was delighted beyond measure, for she knew from the sound and speed of the vehicle that the driver could be none other than her husband, King Nala.

The chariot stopped at the gates of the palace and King Rituparna alighted and went in to call on Bhima. But what was his surprise to find no sign of the announced *swayamvara*. He saw no other king or prince thereabouts, nor did he hear any talk of the *swayamvara*; and no arrangement for the ceremony was in evidence.

King Bhima received him with all honour and respectfully asked him the business on which he had come. Rituparna excused himself with the answer that it was only to pay him his respects. Bhima smiled, for it was rather strange that Rituparna should make such a long journey for no special purpose but he was sure he would learn the reason in time, and so courteously he said, "O my King, you are weary and worn. I pray you refresh yourself and rest your weary limbs."

Then the king's servants escorted the honoured guest to the palace set apart for his stay. Nala unharnessed the horses and

led them to the royal stables and he himself sat in the centre of his chariot to take rest.

KESHINI'S MISSION

Damayanti who beheld him from the palace called her maid-servant, Keshini, and said, "Go close to the chariot and ask the driver that is seated there who he is. Speak gently to him, for I suspect him to be King Nala, and make inquiries about him. Tell him in the end the words which Parnada, the Brahmin, repeated wherever he went."

Keshini approached him accordingly and said, "O flower among men, Queen Damayanti desires to know the business on which you have come."

"The noble King of Ayodhya," answered he, "heard from a Brahmin who came to his court that to-morrow would be held Damayanti's second *Swayamvara*. Forthwith he had the swiftest of horses yoked to his chariot, and drove here at the height of their speed, encouraged by the hope of making her his bride. I am the King's cook and charioteer, Vahuka by name."

"Tell me, I pray you, if by chance you have heard where King Nala has gone," requested the maid.

"No," said the other, "none but Nala's self knows where Nala is. For with his figure changed, he wanders about in disguise." "But will you repeat the reply," Keshini entreated the king, "that you gave the Brahmin Parnada when he told you at Ayodhya, 'O Gambler, O my love, whither did you go, forsaking me, your fond and loving wife, as I lay asleep in the forest? That young forsaken wife remains clad but in a single scarf, as she then was, and ever awaits you. O king, pray have pity on her, whose eyes are ever wet with tears of grief.'"

King Nala repeated his reply, in the midst of which overpowered by grief he broke into tears. Then Keshini went back to her mistress and told her what Nala had said and the change in his personal appearance.

And still Damayanti did not feel quite certain that the charioteer was her husband and again sent the maid back to Nala's side to watch him closely and discover what divine or human attributes he had. After a time Keshini returned, saying, "O Damayanti, to be sure, this charioteer is a pure and virtuous soul. I have never seen his like: if he

reaches a low doorway, he does not stoop to enter it. On the other hand, it grows higher to let him pass. Even cramped rooms make ample space for him. When he needs water, he turns towards the water jars and they are at once filled with water. To kindle a fire, he merely holds a handful of grass in the sun and instantly it breaks into flame. What is more strange, O fair lady, fire does not burn him. Yet another wonder I saw: he once crushed flowers in his hand but they did neither wilt nor fade. And lo! they blossomed more beautifully and smelt sweeter than before."

Damayanti was now quite strong in her idea that the charioteer was King Nala, for he controlled even the weather. And yet she desired to assure herself beyond the shadow of a doubt and so decided to make another test. "O Keshini," said she, "go to the kitchen and bring me some meat that Vahuka has prepared;" and Keshini obeyed. Damayanti who had often eaten the dishes cooked by her husband tasted the food and knew the cook to be King Nala. Then the thought of him made her sad and brought tears to her eyes. Again she sent Keshini

to Nala with her two children to see if he recognised them. At the sight of his son and daughter, Nala ran to meet them and taking them fondly to his lap, wept aloud. And turning to Keshini, he sobbed out by way of excuse, "O fair maid, these two children are so like my own that I cannot help shedding tears." Keshini told Damayanti all that she had seen and heard and the poor queen made no doubt that Vahuka was her dear husband, King Nala. With her parents' permission, she sent for Vahuka.

NALA MEETS DAMAYANTI

When Nala entered Damayanti's chamber and saw her matted hair and dirty scarf, he could not contain himself for grief and his eyes and cheeks were soaked with tears. Damayanti too, beholding Nala's changed state, was overcome with sorrow. But, soon growing calm again, she asked Nala, "O Vahuka, did you hear of the dutiful man who forsook his sleeping wife in the forest? Who other than Nala would leave his poor, innocent, loving wife, as she lay tired and asleep, to her fate in the lonely wild? What was my fault that he should be so cruel to me? How did he

find it in his heart to abandon me who had preferred him to the Immortals, had been ever devoted to him, and had borne him children? Had he not held my hand before the fire and promised solemnly 'I shall ever protect you'? And what became of the promise, when he deserted me in the forest?" Again she burst into tears and the sight of it moved Nala to fresh grief. "O Damayanti, I am that King Nala. Possessed by Kali, I forsook you. It was Kali that lost me my kingdom. It was he that made me desert you in the forest. As long as he dwelt in me, I had no free will of my own. I was a mere tool in his hands. How am I then to blame? At last overcome by the poison of Karkotaka, the serpent king who bit me in the forest, he was obliged to leave me. And so, regaining my free will, I have come here for your sake. May this meeting mark the end of our sorrows. But, Damayanti, would any good woman desire like you to choose a second husband? Have not the royal messengers proclaimed far and wide that you will hold another *swayamvara*? It is for this reason that King Rituparna has driven here fast and furiously."

At this Damayanti was very much afraid and with folded hands said, "It is not meet O King,

that you should suspect me of evil. Did I not prefer you to an Immortal ? It was for the sake of reunion that I sent forth Brahmins in all directions, crying out the words which the learned Prannada uttered in your presence, and when he brought me your answer, I hit upon this device to bring you hither. For, who but you in the whole world could drive his horses so fast as to cover a hundred *yojanas* in a single day ? I touch your feet and tell you solemnly that even in thought I have known no evil. The sun, the moon and the wind are my witnesses and, if ever I have been guilty of any sin against my lord, let them take my life away." And at once there came the answer from Vayu, the wind-god : " O Nala, she knows no sin and I tell you the truth. Only to meet you, she made use of this device, the announcement at the king's court at Ayodhya of another *swayamvara*. Damayanti suits you well and so do you her. Do not harbour any suspicion, but receive her and be united with her." At these words there fell a shower of flowers, celestial music was heard, and a fragrant breeze blew. King Nala beheld this wonder and forthwith his suspicions vanished. Then thinking of Karkotaka, he wore the spotlessly white dress which the snake king had given him. And lo ! Nala

became his old self again. Fondly did the innocent Damayanti see by her side the beautiful king, her husband, and lovingly embracing him wept aloud and sighed deeply with his head resting on her breast. Tenderly embracing his wife and children, King Nala was overjoyed. And so for a long while the reunited pair told each other their sufferings and sorrows in separation and the night was talked away.

Next day, along with Queen Damayanti King Nala sought audience of King Bhima and paid his respects to him. The elderly king received them gladly. Embracing King Nala as warmly as he would his own son, he paid him due honour.

In the meanwhile, the inhabitants of the city learnt of the return of King Nala and delighted beyond measure, set about to bedeck it. The streets were adorned with flags and festoons, and houses were decorated with flower garlands while prayers were offered in temples.

King Rituparna, when made aware that it was Nala who had served him as Vahuka, sought his pardon. "O King of the Nishadas," said he, "pray forgive me, if I have done you any wrong, while you were employed as charioteer under me." But King Nala replied, "O King you have done me no wrong. Even if you did, I should bear

with you. In truth I had never been so happy in my house as during my sojourn in your royal palace. Now I should very much like to impart to you the secrets of horsemanship and charioteering." And so Nala instructed him in the management of horses and, in return, learnt from him his skill in dicing. At last engaging another charioteer, King Rituparna drove back to his own city. After his departure, King Nala did not stay long in the city of Kundinapura.

NALA'S RESTORATION TO FORTUNE

With a small army King Nala set forth to the land of Nishadas where his brother Pushkara had been holding sway. Reaching the capital city, he invited Pushkara to a game of dice, telling him that he had earned vast riches, all which he would stake along with his Queen Damayanti. In case Pushkara had no mind to play at dice he bade him take up his arms and engage himself in fight with King Nala.

But Pushkara, on hearing this challenge, broke into laughter and said, "It is lucky that you should have once again set your heart on gaming, for certainly, I shall gain the wealth you have won. And what is more, I am sure to win your fair

Damayanti on whom my thoughts rest day and night."

Stung by these words, King Nala had half a mind to behead him straightway, but he controlled his anger. "Let us begin the game," he said with a smile, "without further waste of words!" So the game began. In a single throw Nala won and came into the rich treasures which Pushkara staked. "O vilest among kings," said the victorious Nala, "this kingdom is mine. You evilly set eyes on Damayanti while you are unworthy even to look on her. With your retinue you deserve to take your place among her servants. My previous defeat at the dice was due to Kali's mischief alone. I do not wish to punish you for another's fault. I shall spare your life, though you have lost it at dice. Likewise, I shall give you the portion that you once enjoyed as my younger brother. My love for you has never waned nor will it ever wane, for, are you not my brother? May you live a hundred years!" And in the fullness of his heart he embraced his brother again and again. Thus cheered and comforted, Pushkara thanked him for his nobility and forgiveness. "O King, you have granted me my life and my estate. May you have undying fame! And may your life last long."

Together the two brothers lived in great happiness for a month in the royal city. Pushkara then left for his estate and lands. And soon Nala sent for Damayanti who came to the land of the Nishadas with a large army. And great was the joy of King Bhima, when he learnt that King Nala had been restored to his throne. Long and happily did King Nala rule with his queen over the kingdom of the Nishadas, looking after the welfare of his people with a parent's care.

HER BIRTH AND MARRIAGE

HAVE you ever heard the story of the beautiful queen who cheerfully went through fire and water to keep her noble ideal of virtue? Hers was a sad, yet sweet, story. The wife of the foremost ruler in the land, she caused herself to be sold into slavery so that she might enable her lord and husband to pay a debt of honour. With her own eyes she saw her dear son ill-treated by her cruel master and sent on perilous errands, while engaged in one of which he lost his life. Having no money to pay for the disposal of his dead body, she was asked to part with her sacred *mangalya*, the very emblem of marriage, which, as you know, a woman does only on the death of her husband. To raise the money needed for the purpose, she went into a town where she was charged with murder and sentenced to death. Yet in the midst of these great trials, there was never a moment when she wavered in her devotion to virtue.

Her name was Chandramati, the daughter of Matidaya who ruled long ago in the land of Kanouj.

For some time the king had no child, so he undertook to do penance for his sins and offer prayers to God that he might be blessed with a child. At last, pleased with his devotion, Lord Paramasiva granted the desire of his heart, and a daughter of supreme loveliness was born to the king who now rejoiced exceedingly that he had, after so long a time, a child to gladden his royal house. The princess soon grew up into a perfect picture of beauty and a model of virtue.

One day, to the great delight of King Matidaya, certain holy men that went from land to land bathing in the sacred waters and offering worship in famous shrines, brought word that a young king named Harischandra, who ruled over the kingdom of Kosala, desired to marry his daughter, Chandramati. "This young ruler," said they, "comes of a glorious line: he is the son of King Trisanku who aspired to rise to heaven in his earthly form of flesh and blood. In beauty of form and feature this young man has no equal, in prowess he has hardly any superior; in learning few can approach him, in power and dominion he is a prince among sovereigns, and above all, in uprightness of conduct he stands alone. Our pilgrimage has taken us into many lands and we have seen, and stayed with many kings. But none of

them is so fit as Harischandra to marry your daughter Chandramati. And it is good for you, O king, to give her in marriage to this worthy ruler of Kosala."

Pondering long over the words of the holy men, the king was reminded of the words of the great Lord Siva. He had told him when he granted the king his prayer, that round the neck of his daughter to be born would be a *mangalya* and that it would be visible only to the prince who was worthy to wed her. The king doubted if Harischandra could see it and to give no room for any mistake he summoned all the princes and kings of India to the *swayamvara* of his daughter, Chandramati, which was fixed on the seventh day of the sages' visit to his palace.

The auspicious day came. Many were the rulers who had arrived at the capital city of Kanouj to seek the hand of Chandramati. The great hall where her choice of a husband was to take place was gay with decorations and splendid in its riot of colour. The thunder of arriving chariots mingled with the tread of horses as the kings and princes came to take their seats in the hall.

Precisely at the appointed hour, Chandramati came with her maids to make her fateful choice.

She was clad in the finest lace and silk and looked for all the world like a golden image. Decked in costly jewels, she gave a new lustre to the proud hall. With a lovely garland of flowers in her right hand, she trod gracefully through the spacious building and was then slowly escorted by her maids through the extensive rows of princes and rulers whose longing eyes remained fixed on her. As she passed prince after prince, the name and family of each and the kingdom he ruled over were mentioned by the maids.

In time she reached the side of Harischandra who had conceived a longing for her since first he heard the report of her beauty. No sooner did he look at her closely than he rose to the surprise of all the princely suitors. He was taken aback at the sight of the marriage emblem round the neck of Chandramati. Resentfully he asked her father if she had already been wedded. For, what else did the emblem around the neck of Chandramati indicate?

On hearing the question, King Matidaya was delighted, but he did not express his joy. Turning to the other princes, he said, "Do you see, O princes, on Chandramati's neck this emblem of marriage which the Lord of Kosala says she has?

Look closely, please and make answer." With one voice, the princes addressed by the king said, 'No.'

"Nevertheless, King Harischandra has spoken the truth," said Matidaya. "By the grace of the great Lord Siva to whom I had prayed long for the birth of a child, this daughter of mine was born. The emblem which the king of Kosala is able to see has been with her since her birth. The Lord has told me that whoever discovers it shall be Chandramati's husband." All the other princes felt sad, for now their hopes of winning Chandramati for wife were dashed to the ground. The lovely princess of Kanouj forthwith approached Harischandra with glowing face and threw the garland up into the air, when, to her great joy, it fell round the neck of the young king of Kosala.

Then amidst great rejoicings in the city, the marriage of princess Chandramati with King Harischandra was celebrated in all pomp and splendour.

At last, the time came for Chandramati's departure from her father's home. Partings are always sad, and it was a great wrench for the princess who was idolized by the family to leave her loving parents and the sweet joyous home of her childhood. With pain in their hearts, her father and

mother bade her farewell and showered blessings on her and her husband as they set out in a golden car to the city of Ayodhya with a brilliant train of horsemen and attendants.

On their arrival at the city gates a rousing welcome awaited King Harischandra and his lovely queen. Great was the joy of his loyal subjects who saw in his queen the perfection of beauty and virtue. In the splendid palace of Ayodhya surrounded by courtiers and honoured by the loving people of the realm, King Harischandra and Queen Chandramati lived in great bliss and happiness, doing good to all and never straying from the path of duty and truthfulness. And in good time a son was born to them and he was called Devadasa.

CRUEL PLANS

Long, long ago, when the world was in its infancy, the men and women who lived on earth were, as a rule, simple, innocent and God-fearing. For the most part they were innocent of sin and their hearts were pure. Many lived in the forests and spent their days, thinking of God and His glory. They gained divine favour, and some among them, by reason of their virtue and piety, were even allowed to go at will to Heaven and then return to

their earthly abodes. That was a good time indeed for people to live in!

Two such holy men who gained admission to Heaven were Vasishta and Viswamitra. One day when Indra, the mighty king of the Immortals, was in his hall of state, there were in the assembly, by accident, the sages Vasishta and Viswamitra. The talk turned on the question as to who was the most upright of kings that held sway on earth. With an air of pride, Vasishta held that it was King Harischandra of Ayodhya. But you should know there was no love lost between Vasishta and Viswamitra. Both were, no doubt, mighty sages, great in penance and power, but Viswamitra was not as good by nature as Vasishta who had a heart of gold. And many were the occasions, therefore, when the two fell out. So it came to pass that, when Vasishta chanted the praises of Harischandra, Viswamitra cried the king down with equal zeal. Roused by the unkind words of his fellow-sage, Vasishta vowed he would gladly forego all the merit he had earned by his mighty penance, if King Harischandra was shown to be lacking in virtue. And Viswamitra too made a similar vow : " I shall prove what I have said of Harischandra, but, if I fail, I will make over to him half of the spiritual power I have

gained by my prayers and penance in the forest." Presently the assembly broke up and Viswamitra went down to earth, firm in his purpose to prove Harischandra to be an untruthful ruler.

He cast about how best he could make the king of Kosala stray from virtue and at last hit upon a plan. He took his abode in the forests near Kosala. Making straight for the royal palace at Ayodhya, he saw the king, who offered him a hearty welcome unaware of the cruel thoughts that were in the sage's mind. "I have come, O noble king," said the sage, "to solicit your aid in the performance of a great sacrifice. I know your generous heart and that never to any suppliant have you turned a deaf ear. But the sum I require is vast and it is beyond the power of lesser rulers than yourself to furnish."

"Whatever the amount may be, I shall be right glad to find it for you O reverend sage," said the king.

When the king had thus spoken, the sage put the sum as high as his imagination could reach, much higher than he thought it possible that Harischandra could pay, lest the king should be able to keep his promise. The noble ruler heard Viswamitra's demand with great amazement and was preparing

to have it paid to the sage, when the latter said that it might in the royal treasury as the sage's property promising to take it when actually needed. And now desiring more than ever to put the king to a severe test, the sage departed.

Soon after, it was brought to the ears of the king that the wild animals from the forests were laying waste the farms and fields around the city. No such thing had ever happened before and, to the grief of the people, all the growing crops were destroyed. To rid the land of the dreadful pests, the king set out on a big hunting expedition with a large body of skilled huntsmen. The king and his huntsmen reached the forest and hunted long and furiously. Many beasts were killed and the woods were almost cleared of them. At last, tired with the chase, the king and his party lay down to rest at a pleasant spot in the forest.

The king had not been long resting before a ravaging boar appeared on the scene. It was a huge animal, capable of doing great havoc. The king went in pursuit of it. It skilfully evaded being killed for a long time. The king was hot and tired; he had to make the utmost use of his skill and energy to bring the animal down. When, at

length, he succeeded, he found himself near a hermitage. It was sundown and the darkness of the night was already falling on the forest. King Harischandra, therefore, thought it advisable to encamp there for the night with his band of huntsmen who, too, were greatly exhausted with their long hunt.

The hermitage that lay near the place of encampment was that of Viswamitra, the sage who had made a vow to prove that Harischandra was not a highly virtuous king. The boar that had been shot down was one sent by the sage to entice the king to the neighbourhood of the hermitage, for you should remember that the great sage had a hand in the destruction of the crops in the land. It was at his bidding that the animals, which had till then kept themselves to the confines of the forests, found their way to the cultivated lands in the country and ruined the crops. The sage had won power by prayer and meditation, and on account of this he was obeyed by the animals in the forest.

Viswamitra was enraged that the animals he had sent to do harm in the land were slaughtered by the king. He now thought of another plan by which he could make Harischandra suffer. He sent two damsels of low birth to the king's presence to de-

light his heart with music and dance. In case the king offered them a reward, they should accept nothing other than his umbrella of state. The umbrella being the symbol of his kingship, he would for certain decline to part with it. This being so, they should demand that the king must take them as his wives.

Everything turned out as expected. The damsels met the king the next morning, when he was about to depart to his city. They pressed him to see them dance and hear them sing. The damsels sang and danced so beautifully that the king's delight knew no bounds. Harischandra offered presents of costly robes and precious jewels to them, but they demanded the impossible. They asked for the white umbrella that stood as a symbol of his power and kingship. No king would accede to such a request, and least of all Harischandra. Then the damsels insisted that the king should wed them, but the virtuous Harischandra sternly refused and spoke to them severally, even going the length of driving them forth with a stick.

The sage Viswamitra wanted but an excuse to take Harischandra to task, and the incident of the damsels came in handy for his purpose. With eyes burning with wrath, he hastened to the spot where

the king stood with his retinue. At the sight of the sage, Harischandra, like all good kings of old, fell prostrate at his feet. But what do you think the sage did? Did he bless the king according to such custom? No! He gave a kick on the crowned head, which sent the precious diadem flying; it rolled on the ground. But the lord of Kosala was all calmness and patience: "O prince among sages," said he, "what have I done to merit this wrath of yours? I am conscious of no guilt, and if I have done any wrong, please be patient with me."

"So you plead innocence, do you?" said the angry sage. "How do you explain, then, your brutality towards my lovely daughters who came here and sang most sweetly? Instead of rewarding them, you beat them black and blue and drove them forth. Does any ruler who is so cruel to helpless womenfolk deserve to retain the name of sovereign?"

Harischandra explained the whole matter and begged the sage's pardon, offering to make due amends for the wrong done. But the enraged sage was deaf to all reason. At last, he said: "I shall forgive you, only if you take to your bosom my ill-treated daughters as your wives."

But Harischandra was firm. "How can I, a Kshatriya king, marry outcaste women? I would

rather renounce my kingdom than marry them and so forsake my caste."

The cunning sage took him at his word. "If you cannot marry them, then keep your word by giving away your kingdom," said Viswamitra.

This the king did and, when the sage called on him the next day, Harischandra, with all his heart, made a gift of his entire realm to Viswamitra.

CHANDRAMATI SOLD AS A SLAVE

The virtuous Queen Chandramati was exceedingly glad that her husband, the king, had been enabled to keep his 'dharma' even at the cost of his kingdom. She cheerfully accompanied her lord, with her son Devadasa, when he set forth from the kingdom which he had made over to the sage. Before Harischandra departed, the sage found, another occasion to annoy the king. "Where is the large amount of gold you have offered to furnish me for the performance of my sacrifice? You cannot touch the gold stored in the treasury, for it is no longer yours. Pay the amount that you promised and prove yourself a man of your word." This was a fresh blow to Harischandra, but he wavered not. He saw the unfair trick of the sage, yet owned himself a debtor and said, "Mighty sire,

grant me forty days' grace for the payment of this wealth, and I will absolve myself of my debt even at the sacrifice of all that I hold dear." The sage being pleased to grant the prayer, Harischandra left the city to the great grief of all his loving subjects.

To receive payment of the gold due from the former king of Kosala, Viswamitra sent with him a shrewd and deceitful boy called Nakshatresa with secret instructions to tease Harischandra into untruthfulness.

Followed by his fragile wife and her tender son, Harischandra walked barefooted, wending his way towards the city of Benares where he hoped to try his fortune. The way was long and hard, the sun hot and scorching, and the ground sandy and trying. Brought up in the lap of luxury and so taken care of hitherto that not even the winds of heaven had blown roughly over her face, the good-souled Chandramati struggled through sandy desert lands, with her feet torn by thorns and her body bathed in sweat. Seeing her sad plight, her noble lord offered to carry her on his shoulders. But rather than see her husband suffer for her sake, she preferred to face the worst. As for Devadasa, he had to be borne, every now and then, on the shoulders of his father. Many times they rested on the way,

but as often as they rested, the journey seemed unbearably weary.

To add to their hardship, the boy Nakshatresa who followed them was ever grumbling. He was as a thorn in their flesh. He cursed Harischandra as the cause of all his trouble. He complained that the food of fruits and roots which alone the party was able to get on the way was not to his liking. Spurning the fruits, he piteously cried that he had nothing to eat and was dying of hunger. As best as they could, Harischandra and Chandramati tried to comfort him, but he would not be comforted.

And to crown all, on the night of his departure, the once powerful ruler of Ayodhya and his fondly cherished wife and son passed through sufferings that rarely fall to the lot of even the commonest of mankind. The night was dark and dreadful, and a cold and wild wind blew. Again and again, lightning flashed and thunder crashed, and soon it rained heavily. On such a night as that when even the beasts that love darkness were afraid to stir out, the royal family of Ayodhya struggled hard in the storm and darkness to find a shelter from the beating wind and rain. Harischandra saw in this trial the hand of Viswamitra and accepted the fact that it was his lot to suffer.

In the guise of a friend, Nakshatresa advised the suffering king to own that he owed no money to Viswamitra and be rid of all his trouble. But neither Harischandra, the good king, nor Chandramati, his worthy queen, would tell an untruth, even if the heavens should fall.

On the way they had to cross the swollen river of the Jumna, which they did with great difficulty. At long last, after many days' suffering in trackless forests and desert lands, the party reached the holy city of Benares and lodged at a travellers' inn.

The next day the lad who had been sent with the party to demand payment from Harischandra said to him, "You must pay the money due to the sage this very day. I will not let you set your hand to anything until the debt is paid." The demand turned Harischandra pale. He was greatly puzzled and was at his wit's end. With her usual shrewdness Chandramati noticed his sad looks and guessed the cause of his grief. "O dear lord, why should you give way to grief? To pay the debt to the sage, there is only one course and that is an easy thing to do in our present distress. Sell me as a slave and redeem your promise."

The words of his loving wife at first sent a pang to his heart already sore with affliction. But

as he turned her proposal over and over in his mind, he persuaded himself that it was the only way open to him to keep his word to the cruel sage. And yet he could not bring himself to sell away the liberty of his beloved wife. He said, turning to Chāndramati, "What a great soul you are to lose for my sake what is dearer to one than life itself ! How noble, how generous, and how selfless is your offer ! But how can I find it in my heart to sell you away ?"

"Who can resist fate?" answered Chandramati: "All this trouble is not of our seeking. We reap the fruit of our destiny, though we are ever bound to do our duty and must strive our best in all circumstances."

"With a heavy heart, Harischandra offered his wife and son for sale, and at last there came a Brahmin named Kalakanta, who consented to take Chandramati and her boy Devadasa as slaves, paying all the amount of gold which Harischandra owed to the sage Viswamitra. Nakshatresa took delivery of the sum, but he was loth to depart. For he demanded of Harischandra ten thousand pieces of gold as recompense for all the sufferings he had undergone in the company of the king. Justice-loving Harischandra thought it but a fair demand. So he took Nakshatresa along with him through the streets of the city, offering himself for sale at the same

time that he might get the money required by his companion.

Now there came an outcaste called Virabahu. He was drunk and his eyes were bloodshot. He asked the once famous king of Kosala if the latter would take service under an outcaste like him, in which case he was prepared to buy Harischandra. The fallen monarch agreed and the bargain was at once struck at ten thousand pieces of gold which were paid to Nakshatresa.

Virabahu was entrusted with certain duties : he had to execute men who were under sentence of death ; he had to collect a certain tax on the dead bodies of persons burnt or buried in the city. Harischandra worked as an assistant to him and took his place in the burning ground.

The sage Viswamitra saw that his schemes could hardly succeed with Harischandra, and yet he did not cease to devise other plans to bring about the downfall of the unhappy king.

CHANDRAMATT'S SORROW

Chandramati who had lost her liberty and kingdom and parted from her beloved husband had now the misfortune of working under one who was a hard taskmaster. Kalakanta's wife had a sour

temper and flew into a rage at even the slightest mistake. It was the lot of Chandramati, the once glorious queen of Kosala and the idol of the royal home in Kanouj, to suffer bitterly at the hands of a peevish mistress. From morn till night she toiled at her menial tasks, working hard like a galley slave, and the only reward she got for all her labour was constant scolding and bitter rebuke.

Her son Devadasa daily rose long before day-break, gathered flowers for his master to offer to the deity, collected the materials for the daily rites which a Brahmin should perform and, in short, attended to such business as his master set him. Though the boy was scrupulously attentive to his duties, he was frequently scolded and sometimes beaten.

You may now ask whether the world then was after all simple and God-fearing, as was mentioned in the beginning of this story. You should remember it is the good men and true that pass through the fire of suffering. The gods love no better sight than a good man struggling against adversity. It is suffering that makes the virtues of the upright shine forth in all their glory. Only the gold that is refined in the fire is freed from the dross and shines in its full lustre. Sri Rama, the virtuous heir-apparent of

Ayodhya, was banished into the forest for fourteen long years, and had to lose his beloved wife and pass through trying days before he could regain her. Yudhishtira, the Upright, and his righteous brothers were denied their right to their father's kingdom, sent into exile, compelled to work in disguise as slaves and were drawn into a great war which brought untold suffering and misery in the land. Jesus Christ was falsely accused, scourged, crowned with thorns, beaten and crucified. John, the Baptist, was beheaded, Peter was flung into prison, and Paul was beaten with rods and stoned, and was often in danger of death. Chandramati and Harischandra, as models of virtue and goodness, had their own share of the sufferings that sometimes fall to the lot of the most upright mortals in the world.

One day, as usual, Devadasa set out to the forest close by, with lads of his age, to gather firewood for use in his master's house-hold. As he returned, he saw a fine bush of 'dharba' grass, and the thought of securing a good supply of the grass which the Brahmin Kalakanta daily required him to fetch for his ceremonials induced the boy to stop to gather it. As ill-luck would have it, when he had plucked a few blades, out thrust the venomous fangs of a deadly cobra and the poor boy was bitten in

the leg. Soon he foamed at the mouth, reeled and fell down. His comrades to whom he called, when the snake bit him, ran to his help. But what help could these poor lads render in the case of a venomous snake-bite? The boy expired. Then with tears in their eyes, his companions took the shocking news of young Devadasa's death to Chandramati. The poor mother at once fell down in a faint, and when she revived was plunged into bitter grief.

The cobra that had bitten poor Chandramati's son was in reality the Serpent-king Takshaka, who had come into the forest close to Benares, at the bidding of the cruel sage Viswamitra, on purpose to bite the lad and thus further try Harischandra and Chandramati. And the heartless Brahmin Kalakanta, who ill-treated Chandramati, was also under the sage's influence. So, when the grief-stricken woman fell on her knees before him and craved permission to go off and do the last rites to her dead son, he at first sternly refused and remarked, "How does the death of Devadasa affect you? It is I that have lost, by his death, a big sum, the sum that I paid for his purchase. How can you, who have sold him away as a slave, claim kinship with him?"

These words were as daggers in the heart of Chandramati. She pleaded long and earnestly with

her hard-hearted master who at last reluctantly let her go, bidding her return before the next morning.

After a long and weary search in the forest she came upon the lifeless form of Devadasa. The boy whom she had long cherished as the heir to the throne of Ayodhya, as one born to perpetuate her lord's family and keep her and his ideal of virtue alive in the world after they were gone, lay there in the forest dead, fit only to be the prey of eagles. At the sight of his lifeless figure, what a shock had Chandramati! She tore her hair and beat her breast, and all the forest was filled with her weeping and wailing. Tears welled from her eyes as if they were fountains, so sore did she grieve for her beloved Devadasa.

At last remembering that she should be at her post of duty in Kalakanta's house before morning, she checked her grief and hastened with Devadasa's body to the burning ground. She raised a pyre and, placing the body on it, was about to set fire to it, when Harischandra came there and demanded of her the usual fee that should be paid for burning the body in that place.

But where could the unhappy Chandramati, a wretched slave in another's house, find the money needed for the disposal of her dead boy? Oh!

what an unkind fate it was that had heaped such misfortunes upon her afflicted head! Turning to Harischandra whom she did not know in his miserable dress of an outcaste's slave, she pleaded, "O kind sir, I am poor and helpless, an ill-fated slave in extreme distress. Please excuse me the fee."

Harischandra was moved to pity, unaware as he was that the woman who stood before him was his beloved wife and that the dead boy he saw there was his son—his own flesh and blood. In a soft voice he said, "Woman, it is not in my power to free you from the payment of the fee. I am but another's slave and must truly serve my master. I suggest that you sell the *mangalya* of gold I see round your neck and find the sum for the fee due to my master."

These words stabbed her heart. She had till then thought that the emblem was visible to none but her husband. There was the servant of an outcaste who had found it out. She took it for a sign of another misfortune, and expressed her thoughts aloud. It was then that Harischandra learnt who the woman and the dead boy were. When he heard how his darling boy had met with death, he fell into an agony of grief. The whole place echoed with his lamentation in which Chandramati also joined.

At last the woman turned to her husband and said, "It is no use grieving for the dead. What cannot be helped must be endured. Even if the worst should befall us we should not swerve from the path of virtue."

Harischandra then sent his wife to seek help from her master Kalakanta, to find the wherewithal for burning Devadasa on Virabahu's ground.

Again the pitiless Viswamitra caused another misfortune to come upon her, for, while she entered into the city on her way to her Brahmin master's house, she stumbled upon the dead body of a lad. In her confused state of mind, she mistook it for that of her own child, probably dragged there in advance of her by some fox or dog. So she took it up in her arms and began to grieve over her hard lot, when certain officers of the king, finding her with the dead child, took her into the royal presence.

The fact was, that night, at the bidding of the sage Viswamitra, certain burglars entered unseen the king's palace in the city of Benares and stole his child and, killing him, left the body on the road. It was the very form that Chandramati had the ill-luck to find. When it was discovered that the king's child was missing, his officers vigorously sent out search parties in every direction. It was one

as long as life lasts I will never forsake truth. I renounced my wealth and kingdom, I sold my wife into slavery; I lost my only child; and after losing these for the sake of truth, will I ever give it up for recovering my kingdom? What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world at the cost of truth?"

Thus repulsed, the sage saw that all the mighty efforts he had put forth to make the great king of Kosala swerve from virtue were in the end to no purpose, and he owned to himself that he was the loser in the dispute he had had with Vasishta at the court of Indra.

By this time Chandramati arrived at the burning ground. Harischandra saw his wife and did not shrink from his duty. Requesting him to do his work, without minding who it was that he had to kill, she turned her face eastward and prayed that in case of re-birth she might have as her husband the pure-souled Harischandra.

"If all my life I have been devoted to truth," said Harischandra, as he lifted up the axe to kill his condemned spouse, "if in thought, word and deed I have never gone beyond the bounds of virtue, if my wife has always been true and just and virtuous, may that truth save this woman from death." Before the axe could descend, Viswamitra

rushed up to Harischandra, crying, "Stop, stop. Harischandra," and saved Chandramati from death.

The celestials who looked upon this scene from above, showered blessings on Harischandra and Chandramati, and praising their truthfulness brought back their son as well as the young prince of Benares to life.

The sage Viswamitra then unfolded to the king of Kosala the full story of the dispute that arose between himself and Vasishta at the court of Indra. He declared that his main object in putting the king to such severe trials was not so much to prove his point as to publish to the world at large the extremely truthful character of Harischandra, in order that all might follow his ideal. In keeping with his 'vow he gave the king half of the power he had won by his piety and devotion to God.

Returning the kingdom and all the other possessions to Harischandra and blessing him and his wife and son with all his heart, the sage departed to his forest home and there made penance again.

With a royal equipage furnished by the king of Benares, Chandramati and Harischandra set out, accompanied by their son, to their city of Ayodhya where they ruled once more to the great joy of all their subjects.

EXERCISES

1. SAKUNTALA

1. (a) What was the real parentage of Sakuntala? Account for her name of Sakuntala.
(b) What did the sage Kanva say to Sakuntala on his return to the hermitage soon after Dushyanta's departure to Hastinapura?
(c) What manner of man was Durvasa? Why did he curse Sakuntala? What was the curse he laid upon her? When, according to him, would the curse cease to have effect?
(d) What was Kanva's advice to Sakuntala, when she set off for her husband's residence?
(e) How did Sakuntala happen to lose her husband's ring? What resulted from the loss? Whom did the king take her for? Who came to her relief in this distress and how?
(f) How did the fisherman come by the ring which bore Dushyanta's name?
(g) What effect did the sight of the lost ring have on Dushyanta?
(h) How was the reconciliation between Dushyanta and Sankuntala brought about?
(i) Write briefly what Sakuntala suffered from the loss of the ring and how its recovery set things right.
2. Look up in a dictionary :—nymph, absent-mindedness, day-dreaming, errand, marvel, heart-sore.
3. Frame sentences of your own, using :—to account for; with all one's heart; to stand in the way; to break news; to come to pass; to plead for; to come by; to bear with.

4. Rewrite the following, using the words or phrases given in brackets:—
 - (a) I daresay you will read the poet's story when you are old enough. (*Probably*)
 - (b) She is a model of beauty and virtue. (*Picture*)
 - (c) After a while it came to his mind that the boy might be the son of Sakuntala. (*Occur to*)
 - (d) Menaka came down on purpose to turn him away from his penance. (*In order to*)
 - (e) To see him now is not at all practicable. (*Out of the question*)
 - (f) To wed in such a manner is but proper for Kshatriyas. (*On this wise*)
5. Use one word for the italicized in:—
 - (a) The words cut the hermits *to the quick*.
 - (b) He was *every inch* a prince of the noblest blood.
 - (c) She *was lost to sight*.
 - (d) He thought of his sonless state and felt sad *beyond words*.
 - (e) To marry the person whom one loves best is *proper for* the Kshatriya race.
 - (f) He is strong and virtuous *beyond measure*.
 - (g) As *ill-luck would have it*, the ring slipped down into the water below.

N.B.—Consult a good dictionary like, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, while doing the exercise.

2. SAVITRI

1. What kind of king was Aswapathi? What was the dark cloud that hung over his happiness? How did he at last get rid of that cloud?
2. How did Savitri, while she remained in her father's home, endear herself to every one? Why did not the young princess of the land make bold to seek her hand in marriage? What distressed

her father, when she was about eighteen years old? What was the course he then resolved upon?

3. What did Savitri do, during the journey she made, to find a husband for herself? On whom did she set her heart at last, and what was his history? What do you know about his character?
4. Why did Narada warn the king against his daughter's marriage with Satyavan? What answer did Savitri make, when her father advised her to choose some other youth for her husband?
5. What manner of life did Savitri lead in the hermitage?
6. When and why did she take the vow of a three days' fast and vigil?
7. What were the boons which Savitri secured from Yama one after another? What did he tell her when he granted her the last boon?
8. Give an account of what the aged Dyumatsena and his wife did in their anxiety for Satyavan's safety. Tell in a few sentences how they were restored to the throne of the Salwas.
9. Savitri is looked upon by some as the Indian Alcestis. Tell in brief the story of Alcestis.
10. Write shortly how Savitri pleaded with Yama and prevailed on him to give her husband back to her.
11. Study the following sentences carefully and make out their meaning:—
 - (a) A dark cloud hung over his happiness. (b) Care sat on his faded cheek. (c) Truly the stars are against me. (d) Life is not all honey. (e) He is the pick of all the princes. (f) But Savitri was not of common clay. (g) She was much shaken, but her purpose was not. (h) His days are numbered.

12. Frame sentences on the model of those given below.
 - (a) Blessed as he was with power and wealth, he had no children.
 - (b) The older he grew, the more unhappy he became.
 - (c) Ask for any boon but your husband's life and I shall as readily grant it.
13. Find the meaning of the following, and use them in complete sentences:—

To be taken aback; to cross one's will; to come upon; to become man and wife; to look for; to cross one's path; to sing the praises of; one's blood runs cold; to meet one's doom.

3. DAMAYANTI

1. Make up a paragraph. dealing with the nature and character of King Nala.
2. What was the message that the swan carried to Damayanti?
3. On what mission was Nala sent by the gods? Give an account of what happened at his first meeting with Damayanti.
4. Describe in your own words Damayanti's *swayam-vara*.
5. Why was Kali angry with Damayanti? What did he make up his mind to do in consequence? How did he carry out his resolution?
6. Give the substance of the conversation that Nala had with Damayanti, when he was deprived of his garment by the birds.
7. What troubles befell Damayanti as she wandered about in the forest in search of her husband?
8. Give an account of the story told by Damayanti to the dowager queen of the Chedis. Under what condition did she agree to stay in the royal palace?

How did the people in the palace learn who she really was?

9. What help did Nala render to Karkotaka? Why did Karkotaka bite him? And what was his advice to Nala?
10. Describe, in your own words, the plan devised by King Bhima to find out the whereabouts of Nala and to bring him to Vidharbha?
11. How was Nala restored to fortune?
12. What was the one great failing which King Nala had? How did it affect the course of his life and fortune?
13. Express in your own words the sense of:—
 - (a) She was the flower of wifely patience. (b) Hence I have thrown a veil over my feelings.
 - (c) They were Nala's self in form and features. (d) His mind swung like a pendulum, now pulled away by Kali, now pulled back by love. (e) He is heading towards ruin. (f) I was there in the pomp of fortune and shed glory upon you. (g) I was a mere tool in his hands.
14. Substitute other words for those printed in italics but do not alter the sense:—(a) One *auspicious* morning was held the 'swayamvara'. (b) There was a *splendid array* of seats rising *tier upon tier*. (c) She made a *humble obeisance*. (d) The *long-looked for* opportunity came. (e) You may *perchance* make good what you have lost. (f) In your *distraction* you may abandon me. (g) How can you be left alone in this *desolate* forest. (h) Finding her *plight*, he cleft the mouth of the snake. (i) With a *wan and woeful* look, she reached the place. (j) Damayanti told her sad story to the *dowager queen*. (k) Many have gone forth to seek you and bring *tidings* of you. (l) This lady of

peerless beauty has a mole on her face. (m) *Es-corted* by a strong force, she was borne in a litter to Bhima's city. (n) You were *hard upon* me. (o) Has sorrow *turned her brain*? (p) I was exceedingly happy during my *sojourn* in your palace. (q) Even *cramped* rooms make ample space for him. (r) They did neither *wilt* nor fade. (s) All your *kith and kin* are deep in grief for your sake.

15. Look up the following idioms in a good dictionary, learn their meanings and use them in complete sentences:—To go back on one's word; to fall in with; to be at a loss; to come to grief; to do one a good turn; to turn a deaf ear to; to take counsel with; to come about; to fall on evil times; to leave one to one's fate; to betake oneself to; to forsake the world; to lay at the door of; to take oneself off to; to seek audience of; to have a mind to.

4. CHANDRAMATI

1. Who praised the virtues of Harischandra at the court of King Matidaya and what did they say?
2. What doubt entered Harischandra's mind when he looked closely at Chandramati on the occasion of her swayamvara? How was it cleared?
3. Describe in your own words the dispute between Vasishtha and Viswamitra at the court of Indra, the King of Immortals?
4. Relate the incident of the damsels who danced before Harischandra, under the following heads:—Who sent them to the king?—his instructions to them—his real motive in the matter—the damsels' demand—the king's driving them forth with a stick—what followed.

5. Tell briefly what sufferings Harischandra and Chandramati passed through on their way to Benares.
6. Narrate the circumstances that led to Chandramati being sold as a slave.
7. How did Harischandra come to take service under Virabahu? What were the duties which the former king of Kosala had to do as an assistant to Virabahu?
8. Describe the troubles which Chandramati had in the house of Kalakanta.
9. Describe the conversation that passed between Chandramati and her husband in the burning ground, when she went there to dispose of Devadasa's body.
10. What misfortune befell Chandramati on her way to Kalakanta's house to find the wherewithal for burning Devadasa on Virabahu's ground?
11. Write a composition on 'The Triumph of Truth' using the following notes. You may begin thus "There is no greater virtue than truth, which is far higher than life in this world. While life is but a dream, truth lasts for ever....."
(1) *Introduction*.—The importance of truth. (2) *Body*.—The story of Harischandra which illustrates the triumph of truth—his renunciation of wealth and kingdom, the sale of his wife into slavery and the loss of his only child all of which were done for the sake of truth; and the final reward he got for his truthfulness. (3) *Conclusion*. (Here mention the points to which all the incidents of the story have been leading: *One should stick to truth at all costs.*)

12. Use the expressions given in brackets, in the following sentences:—

(a) Vasishta and Viswamitra were not on good terms (*no love lost between*) (b) Many were the occasions when the two quarrelled. (*fall out*) (c) He was quite puzzled. (*wit's end*). (d) The sage wanted but an incident to rebuke Hanschandra (*take to task*). (e) You beat them severely and drove them forth. (*black and blue*). (f) Prove yourself a man that keeps his promise. (*a man of one's word*). (g) According to his vow he gave the King half of his power. (*in keeping with*). (h) Vasishta sang the king's praises, but Viswamitra spoke disparagingly of him. (*cry down*).

13. Frame sentences of your own using the following: - To go through fire and water; by virtue of; to make over to; to have a hand in; to make amends for; to be deaf to; to take one at one's word; to absolve oneself of; to try one's fortunes in the guise of; to claim kinship with.

14. Express in your own words the sense of

(a) In prowess he has hardly any superior. (b) Partings are always sad and it was a great wrench to leave her loving parents. (c) What have I done to merit this wrath of yours? (d) Hanschandra saw in this trial the hand of Viswamitra. (e) Kakakanta's wife had a sour temper and often flew into a rage. (f) It is the good men and true that pass through the fire of suffering. (g) He was as a thorn in their flesh. (h) The lord of Kosala was all calmness and patience.

